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BOYS AND GIRLS OF OTHER DAYS

FIRST SERIES

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RICHARD AND THE DYING PAGE.

BOYS AND GIRLS OF OTHER DAYS

A Reader for Upper Standards

BY

JOHN FINNEMORE

AUTHOR OF

FAMOUS ENGLISHMEN, 'SOCIAL LIFE IN ENGLAND,' ETC.

FIRST SERIES

WITH TWENTY-SEVEN ILLUSTRATIONS

A. & C. BLACK, LTD.

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If you want to know my
name see page 50.

PREFACE.

THIS book puts into shape a plan which the writer has found very effective in teaching what may be called the colour and form of History.

It is easily possible for children to be date-perfect and fact-perfect, and yet to have no idea of the hues which life wore in those far-off days. Indeed, it is often found that children regard the people of distant times as pure abstractions and not of like flesh and blood with themselves. This difficulty can only be grappled with by setting the imaginative side of the child mind to work.

Put before them a picture of a child's life in those days. Tell them a story in which a boy or girl, much of their own age, takes a share in the events of his or her time, and the history lesson becomes another thing.

The present book is an attempt in this manner. History proper cannot, of course, be learned from it, though a slight thread of fact connects the stories.

It is meant as a reading book for Upper Classes which, while pleasing children with the movement of the scene, will place before them a picture of the time; in fine, it aims at giving them, upon a tiny scale, the effect which an historical novel has for their elders.

Great care has been taken to keep the language easily within their comprehension, and, as the book has been written by a working teacher for working teachers, it is hoped that this end has been attained. Nothing is more easy than to cloud the meaning of a whole passage for a child by a single obscure word. And the teacher is much more usefully occupied in enlarging his scholars' horizon, in deepening their impressions of time and scene, than in drilling them in verbal niceties which really belong to another and later stage of their education.

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THE COMING OF THE ROMANS.

I. A HOME IN ANCIENT BRITAIN.

II. PREPARING FOR THE FOE.

III. THE BATTLE ON THE SHORE.

I.

A HOME IN ANCIENT BRITAIN.

ONE bright morning—long, long ago in old Britain, little Feltor sat up from sleep and rubbed his eyes. Feltor's home consisted of one large, round room, with walls of great oak logs, their chinks plastered with clay, roof of branches covered with a thatch of rushes, and a floor of mud. In the middle of the floor a fire (of wood and turf mixed) was burning, and the smoke, driven hither and thither by the wind blowing in freshly at the open door, finally escaped through a hole in the highest part of the roof. The place where Feltor was sitting was a raised bench running all round the house, and upon this bench the family slept. On the opposite side of the room a heap of skins tossed aside marked

the place where his parents had been sleeping, but they were now gone. Springing down upon the soft rushes which covered the floor, Feltor ran across the room.

“Meneg,” he cried, “Meneg, wake up.”

Beside his parents' couch lay his baby brother, carefully wrapped in a black bearskin, his bright hair shining brighter still against the soft, glossy depths of the fur. Meneg opened his eyes sleepily, to smile on his brother, then shut them again and nestled deeper into his soft, warm bed, while Feltor laughed, and ran through the open door. Here he found his mother, busy with the hand-mill grinding corn, and he went at once to help her.

“I can do that, mother,” he cried.

His mother smiled and gave him the handle of the mill to turn while she went to fetch more corn. Feltor ground away busily, and looked round at the same time to see where his father was. No sign of him could be seen about their patch of cleared land, hemmed in on one side by the thick forest, and on the other by a deep, slow river, nor could the boy see their two great hunting dogs, Bran and Lwyd.

“He has gone hunting,” thought Feltor, “I

wish I had been up early enough to start with him."

At this moment a long, wild howl rang from the forest and Feltor looked that way.

"Ah, ha, old wolf," said the boy "you would not dare to come so close as that if Bran and Lwyd were at home. They would make you howl in earnest, I know."

Then he turned again to grinding the corn and worked away with a will, taking but little notice of anything else.

Suddenly a loud scream from his mother startled Feltor, and, looking up, he saw little Meneg, who had escaped unseen from the house, more than half across the clearing, and toddling steadily towards the gloomy dusk of the thick forest.

"Meneg, Meneg, come back, come back!" shouted Feltor, leaping up and flying, swift as a bird, after his little brother, while his mother ran also with loud outcry. But what was that silent, gliding, grey form, slipping like a flitting shadow through the underwood, straight for the tiny figure? Both Feltor and his mother knew it for a wolf and ran swifter still and shouted yet louder. Meneg stopped and looked back on them, then turned in his gay mischief, and toddled

*A good book
Michael*



MENEG AND THE WOLF.

forward. Now, the wolf was at the edge of the forest, and Meneg was midway between the runners and the great shining teeth ready to seize him. Had the old, grey wolf dashed out at once into the open, there would have been no chance to save the child. But he lingered for a moment under the last patch of cover, while he looked right and left to be sure that this was no trap laid for him. He knew well enough how these people prized his thick, warm skin, and he was in no

hurry to part with it. This delay saved Meneg. On came Feltor like the wind, caught his little brother and swung him into his mother's arms as she ran up, and the gaunt, grey wolf slipped back into the depths of the wood to look for another breakfast. Back they went to the house, Meneg's mother holding him tight to her, and telling him what would certainly happen if he ran away to the wood where the wolf and wild boar lay hidden, when a great barking of dogs arose beyond the river. Feltor sped to the brink and looked eagerly across. He knew the sounds well, and shouted "On Bran, On Lwyd. Good dogs!" Then he shouted again with redoubled delight for the chase swept into view. Beyond the river lay a wide open glade carpeted with short, fine turf; and down this came bounding a great stag, his branching horns rising tall and stately, his smooth, dun hide spotted and streaked with mud and foam, while at his haunches, and gaining on him little by little, leap by leap, came two great hounds, their lips parted, their shining fangs bared for the final spring, their shaggy bodies almost touching the ground as they urged their fierce, tireless gallop.

"He will take to the river. He must come this way," cried Feltor, and running swiftly to the

house, he caught up his bow and a couple of arrows. He had grown up with a bow in his hands, and his father had carefully trained him to shoot ; but he had never winged an arrow at such game as this. He darted back to the river bank in time to see the stag take a huge leap out into the stream. Bran and Lwyd made a final spring, but missed their prey, and tumbled pell mell into the water at his wake. Swiftly all three swam across, and Feltor, touching the point of his arrow and finding it keen, fitted it to his bow and ran towards the point for which the stag was making. He was but a dozen yards away when the stag, feeling the sandy bottom beneath his feet, stood up and shook the water from him in a shower. Then he gained the shore at a single bound, when Feltor's bow twanged like a harp-string. Rearing furiously, the stag made three tremendous bounds forward, then rolled over dead, with Feltor's arrow buried deep in his heart.

"Down, Bran ! Down, Lwyd !" shouted the boy as the dogs started forward, and the obedient hounds fell to his side at once. His mother came full of praises of his skill, and little Meneg came also and tugged at the hide of the dead deer while Feltor walked proudly round and round the great

antlered creature, scarcely able to believe that he had made his first great shot, and was now a hunter like his father. It was several minutes before the latter appeared, a tall man, with flowing hair and beard, running swiftly on the traces which dogs and deer had left.

"Come, father," shouted Feltor, gleefully, "Come, I have shot the stag."

"You," cried his father in surprise, as he paused on the opposite bank, breathing heavily after his long run, and leaning on his spear.

"Yes," said Feltor's mother, proudly, "It fell to a single arrow."

The boy himself was running to a little nook in the bank above, and, in a moment, had unloosed a coracle lying there and jumped in. Dipping a short, broad-bladed paddle in the stream, he had soon ferried his father across, and the group collected about the fallen deer.

"When I saw the dogs heading him for home," said his father, "I thought it was lucky for me, but I did not dream of this. Come, Feltor, you have beaten me by three years. I was fifteen before I killed such a stag as this."

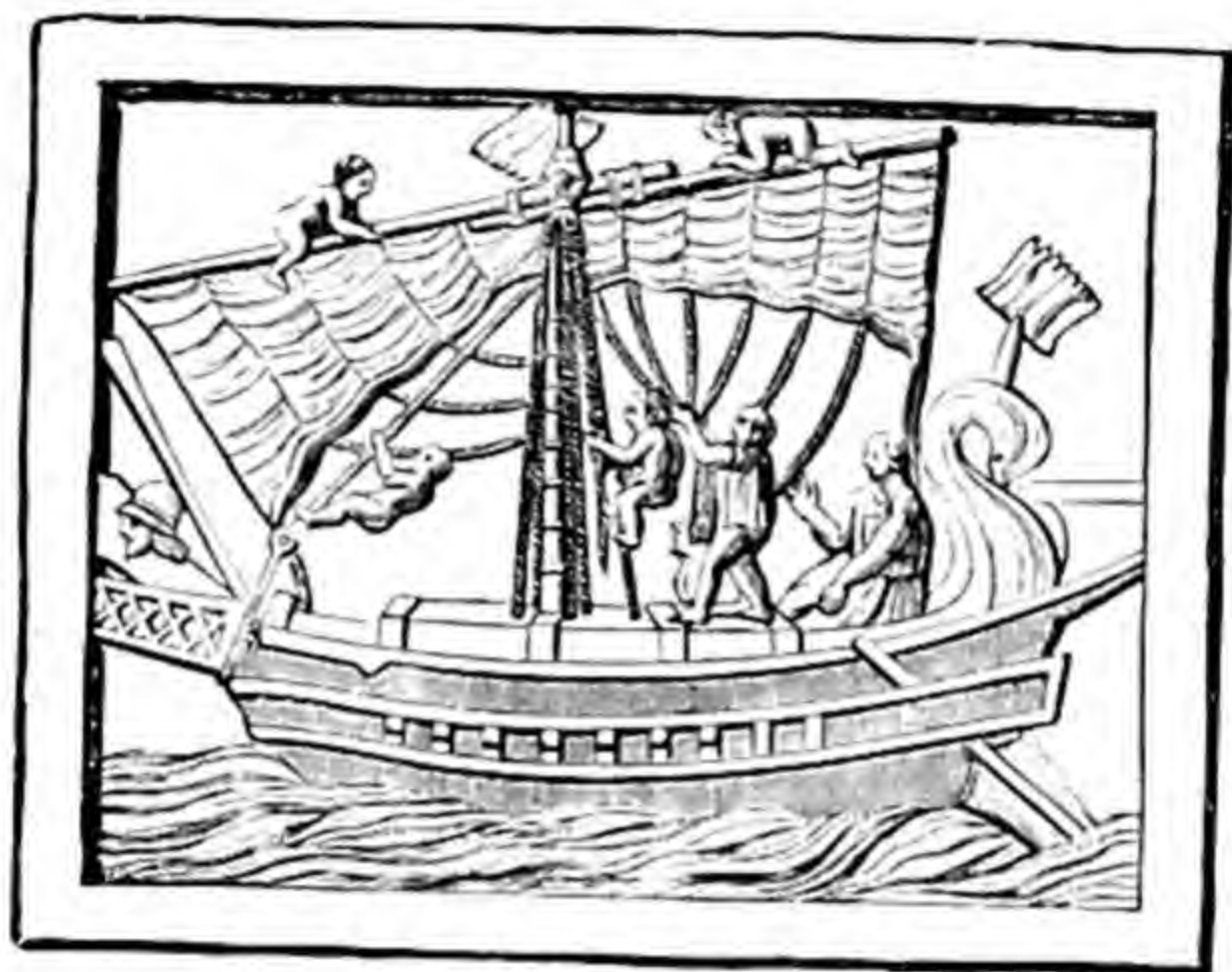
"I think Feltor ought to have the skin for his bed," said his mother, smiling.

"A good idea," answered his father, "and it shall be stripped off at once." He took his knife in his hand, and was about to make the first cut, when he paused and looked fixedly before him. Feltor and his mother looked also, and saw in the distance, at the farthest point of the long clearing, a running figure. It was a young man, his head bent down, and coming on at the top of his speed.

Not a word was spoken until the runner came quite near. Then, raising his head, he saw them and flung up his hands, crying out, "The Romans! The Romans are coming!"

Everyone started, and looked eagerly at each other. The dreaded Romans were coming. What might they not expect? For some time the fear of the coming of the Romans had been hanging like a cloud over that part of the southern coast. The ships, which came regularly from Gaul to fetch the much prized tin, had brought news of the intentions of the great Roman leader. The Britons knew that the mighty captain, Julius Cæsar, was angry with them for the aid they had rendered to their friends, the Veneti, in Gaul; they knew the Roman greed of conquest, and how Cæsar was bent on subduing everyone to his will; and they knew that no hope remained to

them except to battle bravely for their freedom and their country. But of all foes there was none to be dreaded like the Romans. Sea or land, alike



A ROMAN GALLEY.

they fought and conquered. Had not the friends of the Britons, the Veneti, confident in their strong ships and skilful seamanship, laughed Cæsar's power to scorn and ill-treated his messengers, who summoned them to surrender? And had not Cæsar, building ships and manning them with Roman sailors and soldiers, utterly overthrown the powerful Veneti, slain many of them, and sold the rest into slavery? All these things had been talked of in Feltor's home; for his mother's brother sailed to and fro across the strait

with cargoes of tin, bound overland to Massilia, the modern Marseilles.

"I am sent, Beric, to bid thee to the council of chiefs," cried the messenger to Feltor's father. "A galley has come in with sure news of the enemy."

Beric threw up his hand in token of assent, and turned hastily towards the house. Feltor ran swiftly before, and springing to the wall above his father's bed, lifted down the small, round shield which, with a long sword, hung there always ready. Quickly girding himself with his sword and swinging his shield over his shoulder, Beric strode away for the place of meeting, Feltor and the messenger following closely at his heels.

Assent
assent

II.

PREPARING FOR THE FOE.

FOR twenty minutes, Beric and his companions followed a narrow path cut in the thickness of the wood, then they came out on a wide, open, grassy valley, dotted about with houses like their own, and here and there yellow patches of corn still unreaped, while by the riverside herds of horses and oxen were quietly grazing. Passing through this pleasant scene, they went on up the hillside among the trees, and came out on the upland above. Here, they looked out over a wide heath with a white road winding over its dark face and passing below the hillock on which they stood. Along this road came a string of clumsy waggons, creaking and groaning, each drawn by four sturdy horses. In front came a burly figure, spear in hand, leading the first horse, and Feltor knew him for Sermat, the trader, who brought the tin far from the west, from distant Cernyw to their own coast, from which, on a clear day, one could mark the galleys passing over the strait from the white cliffs of Britain to the dim shores of Gaul.

“What, ho! Sermat!” shouted Beric. “Go no further with thy tin.”

“And why not, Beric?” asked the trader.

“There is other work to be done by the shore now than carrying tin to ships,” cried Feltor’s father, “The Romans are coming and we must face them.”

“Is it so?” said the other gravely. “’Tis a terrible foe.”

“Come with me to the council,” cried Beric. “Thou knowest much of affairs beyond the sea and canst give us much assistance.” The trader nodded, and gave a shrill whistle. Two of his men started forward from the rear of the train, and Sermat bade them turn aside the waggons to the village below and there remain until certain news came of the movements of the Romans. Then the trader and Beric marched forward, but Feltor followed them no further. Far out in the heath rose a great mound, covered with a thick, dark grove of oaks. This was the sacred grove where the Druids held their sacrifices and where the chiefs met in council, and Feltor dared not approach nearer. He flung himself at full length on the soft turf and watched the heath, dotted here and there with the figures of those gathering to

the council. Presently a patter of bare feet sounded along the path near Feltor, who looked up and cried joyfully, "Hanun," and a boy of about his own age ran up and flung himself down beside Feltor. This was his friend Hanun who lived in the house nearest to Feltor's home and was his constant companion. For a long time the boys lay and talked of the coming struggle, wishing that they were only old enough to be admitted to the ranks of the fighting men, when at last they saw a figure leave the council grove and run swiftly by the nearest path for the village below.

"It is a message to the people in the village," said Feltor. "Let us go and see what it is!" They sprang up at once and hurried down through the wood to the plain, but the messenger of the council was there before them, and his news had thrown the place into bustle and confusion. Some were harnessing horses and oxen to waggons, others were bringing clothing and weapons out of their dwellings, women and children were busy as ants fetching corn out of the storehouses, boys and dogs ran shouting and barking to gather up the herds of cattle and to drive the sheep and pigs together, while the old and feeble had sallied out from the firesides and were making their way towards a

lofty hill which rose solitary from the plain. The boys knew at a glance what the message had meant. The chiefs had ordered the non-combatants to take refuge in the "Dinas," the great hill fort, and away flew Feltor to tell his mother of the movement. In two hours he was back again, leading a waggon drawn by two slow-stepping oxen, and laden with food and household gear, his mother walking behind with Meneg in her arms. A rude track ran down the middle of the valley towards the tall, solitary hill, and Feltor guided the oxen along it. Soon they were in the midst of a stream of their neighbours, all busily engaged in conveying food and the best of their simple furniture to the place of refuge. At the foot of the hill they stopped, for the slope was too steep for the waggon, and Feltor and his mother, each shouldering a burden, went quickly up. The top of the hill presented a curious scene. Originally almost flat, a tiny tableland, it had been dug out and the cleared earth piled around as a breastwork until it looked like a huge saucer with shallow sides gently sloping inwards from the rim of the earthwork. A deep trench had been dug outside the wall, and, in the latter a narrow gateway had been left to be closed with a strong palisade when

the enemy should approach. The wide expanse of turf enclosed by the fortification was crowded with swiftly moving figures, each busy with an appointed and well-understood task. Some were erecting shelters of dressed skins stretched on a framework of hazel and willow boughs; some were driving stakes into the ground to tether oxen, sheep, and swine who had been driven up to serve as food; others again were rolling and hoisting into place on the outer edge of the trench huge stones, so that a single push might send them bounding down among an attacking force. These last workers were chiefly busy on the side where the road ran up, the remaining sides of the hill being very steep and encircled by the river. Trip after trip, up and down, were made by Feltor and his mother until all their movables were safe in the shelter of the hill fort. By this time the council had broken up and Feltor's father came to them at once.

"The Romans have already assembled on the farther side," he said, "they may be here any day now. A ship which came in this morning for tin brought the news. The sailors on board saw a great fleet lying off the shore ready to carry the Romans across. But there is no time to be lost. Much corn remains still to be cut and we must

make it all safe before our enemies arrive. It would be madness to leave it for them." So saying he hurried away to the plain below to assist the band of workers who were cutting down the yellow corn, and tying it in bundles ready for carrying away to safe hiding places, after the fort was fully stored. Feltor and his friend Hanun ran to assist the herdsmen, Bran and Lwyd bounding at their heels. The great mass of the domestic animals was driven far into the depths of the forest and pastured in hidden glades where the enemy could not reach them, a band of watchers remaining with them to keep off wild beasts, and to confine the animals within bounds. In such labours as these the day passed swiftly and, with the darkness of the night, the wearied Britons flung themselves down and were soon wrapped in the deep sleep of tired men. ✕

The first shining of dawn over the eastern tree tops was the signal for everyone to be astir. Scouts were sent from the "Dinas" to glean news on every side, news of the coming of the enemy, news of what forces of their friends were gathering to join in the struggle against the invaders. From the watchers on the cliffs, five miles away, word was soon brought that no signs of the hostile

galleys were yet to be seen, while from all other directions came reports of bodies of their kinsmen gathering and marching for the coast. The valley below the hill fort lay in the direct line of march and had been agreed upon at the council as the meeting place, and so, all day long, a great throng of fighting men gathered and thickened there. Tall, strong, savage-looking fellows they were, their bodies blue with the woad with which they had stained themselves to look more dreadful to their enemies. Everyone was armed with spear and sword and shield, some riding the strong, wiry horses, reared in that country-side, others driving chariots, which they handled with wonderful skill, sending them over places where it seemed impossible for horses and wheels to go.

For hours Feltor and Hanun wandered through the great camp which had formed itself in their familiar valley, gazing with delight on the ever-changing scene, nor did they return to the "Dinas" until the dusk was falling and the watch fires beginning to brighten all over the plain.

The next morning the boys were sitting on the edge of the earthwork dangling their feet over the deep trench and staring down into the thick, white mist which hid the valley and the camp. But,

though nothing could be seen, yet the rattle of wheels, the ring of weapons against armour, the confused murmur of the host came up through the sharp, pleasant September air to show that things were still as they had seen them the night before.

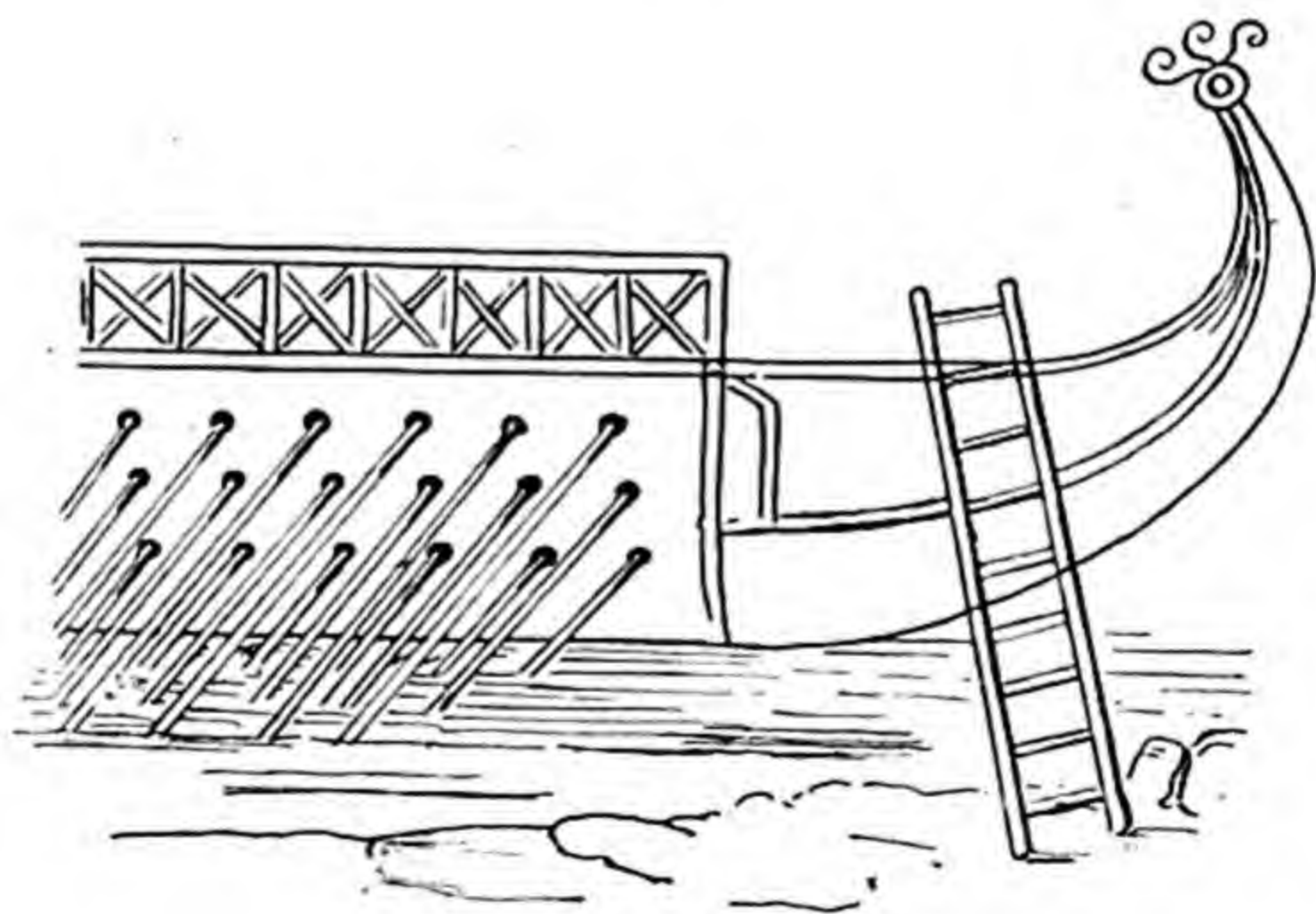
Suddenly, at the lower end of the valley, the murmur deepened, then swelled into outcry and uproar, a billow of deafening sound which rolled up the hollow vale, man shouting to man, a rush to arms, the thundering of horses' feet, the tumult of an army aroused and springing to battle. Leaning forward, the boys eagerly watched and soon saw half-a-dozen figures spring up the hill through the mist. Leaping down inside, the boys flew to the gate in time to hear the foremost messenger shout his tidings.

"The Romans are coming," he cried. "They have set sail and will be here in a few hours."

At that instant the autumn sun broke out strongly, and the river mists began to thin and scatter. The army below soon began to come into view, a moving mass already marching for the threatened point. At the lower end of the valley where the road plunged into the woodland, a steady stream of horse and foot was pouring into the dark shade of the forest. On they marched, the manes

of the horses tossing in the morning wind, the points of the shining spears flashing in the morning sun, until the plain was empty once more, and the hill fort was tenanted only by those unable to bear arms, and a strong body left to protect them.

But where were Feltor and Hanun? A great longing to see the terrible Romans for themselves had drawn them on, and they were now following at the rear of the line. Feltor had swung his bow and half-a-dozen arrows over his shoulder and Hanun had picked up a javelin which someone had left behind in the confusion. *> a kind of spear*



TRIREMIS.

III.

THE BATTLE ON THE SHORE.

A short march brought the army to the shore, and the British warriors rapidly formed their line of battle along the sand. Feltor and Hanun climbed a rough path leading up the cliffs, and, springing out on the grassy summit, eagerly looked over the sea. Yes, there they were, the Roman galleys, far out at sea but twinkling with countless points of light as the sun flashed on the polished brass armour of the invaders. The boys perched themselves on the brink of the cliff and watched with all their eyes. On the shore below, the Britons had flung themselves down to rest from their march, and to eat and drink of the provisions they had brought. Two or three hours slipped by and the galleys came steadily on, until at last it was plain to the eye that they were crowded from stem to stern with soldiers in shining helmets and breast-plates. Now, the Britons lined the shore closely, the front rank prepared to hurl their javelins while those behind clashed their swords against their shields and shouted till the uproar rang from cliff to

cliff like thunder. But on came the ships, led by a larger one, on whose prow stood a man with a pale, severe face, carefully scanning the shore. This was the famous Julius Cæsar, the great Roman captain. He soon saw that the Britons had placed themselves in position to defend the best landing place, but he directed the galleys towards it and on they moved, their great oars sweeping backwards and forwards until the ships were close inshore. Many of the Britons dashed waist deep into the sea and hurled their javelins. So skilfully were these flung that numbers fell directly into the vessels where the soldiers were lining the sides, ready to leap down and march ashore. Another, and another shower of spears fell among the Romans, and it was plain that they did not like the idea of leaping into those dark waves, where to be struck down meant not merely a wound, but certain death. So, for awhile, even the terrible soldiers of Rome hung back. Cæsar saw the hesitation of his men and thought of a plan for driving the Britons off a little. There were, on board the ships, engines for throwing great stones and darts, and he ordered the men who worked these engines to direct them against the natives. This was done, and soon the Britons found that their spears were being answered

by great stones, which fell as if from the sky, and keen darts. Unused to this kind of fighting, they gave ground, and the water was left clear.

The boys on the cliff above had watched all this breathlessly. "The Romans are frightened, they dare not come," cried Feltor. "They do not move now."

"They are frightened," repeated Hanun. But at this moment a strange thing happened. A tall man sprang to the side of the foremost vessel. Instead of a sword and shield he held in his hands a strong staff crowned with the figure of an eagle. Raising this in the air, he called out to his companions, "Leap, comrades, unless you wish to see your standard taken by the enemy." So crying, he leapt into the tossing waves and marched alone against the Britons, holding the standard high above his head, and his face set firmly against the foe.

"Oh, brave, brave!" cried Feltor, "He fears nothing." Then both boys cried out in wonder at what followed. For at a flash, thousands and thousands of Roman soldiers bounded eagerly from the ships to save their standard bearer and his precious burden. The Britons, swinging their long swords above their heads, dashed to meet

them, and a dreadful battle was joined between the ships and the shore. Many a brave fellow fell on either side, but in spite of the utmost efforts of the defenders, the Romans fought their way, slowly and steadily, to land. For a few moments the battle slackened. The Britons fell back, and the Romans halted on the edge of the surf and re-formed their broken line. Then the opposing ranks swept against each other again and met with a dreadful crash. But they fought on other terms now. In the water it had been a struggle man to man, but now the Britons dashed in vain against the solid Roman line. In vain they hurled their javelins, and swung their swords, and urged their chariots against that wall of brass. Covered by their great, curved shields, dealing deadly thrusts with their short broad swords, the Roman legions, trained to act as one man, drove the Britons in hopeless confusion before their terrible charge.

From the cliff above, the boys had watched the progress of the fight, and not they alone, but hundreds of others, women and aged warriors, had gathered to encourage their friends below with shouts of triumph when they gained an advantage, to mourn with shriek and outcry the fall of some well-known figure. As the Britons broke and fled

before the last awful rush of the legions, a long, mournful wail burst from the watchers above, then they also dispersed in flight. Yet Feltor and Hanun remained, their eyes fixed on the shore where scattered parties still kept up a desperate struggle. Suddenly, Hanun stretched out his arm.

“Look, Feltor,” he cried.

Feltor looked, and saw his father struggling up the path which led to the spot where they lay. Slowly and painfully, leaning hard upon his spear, for he was sorely wounded, Beric toiled upwards.

“Come, father,” shouted Feltor, and then he shouted again and louder still, for two helmets flashed round a winding below, and two light-armed Romans, of the band who were pursuing the flying Britons, came into view, bounding one after the other up the narrow path. Beric glanced behind and toiled on faster still, and Feltor leapt to meet him. The leading Roman, seeing his prey almost beyond his reach, stopped and poised a javelin. As he did so, Feltor dropped on his knee, an arrow fitted to his bowstring. He took swift aim and shot. Almost with the twang of the parting shaft a roar of pain arose from the soldier below and his javelin dropped from his right hand, while, with his left he tore at the arrow which Feltor had sent



HOW FELTOR SAVED HIS FATHER.

through and through his forearm. Then he sprang forward again, but, in his rage, missed his footing, and, falling heavily upon his comrade close behind, both rolled down the path. Before they could recover themselves, Feltor and his father had gained the top of the cliff, and, to their joy, saw Hanun leading a masterless horse which he had pursued and seized as soon as he saw Beric's plight. In an instant, Feltor's father was astride, and the two boys, each seizing a handful of the flowing mane, kept easily up as the horse galloped away over the smooth turf which ran inland. On they went, mile ~~at~~ ^{after}, the good horse going steadily along the forest road, and the boys, fleet as young deer, bounding at its side. Such was their speed that they were among the first to arrive at the "Dinas" where the news of disaster put everyone on the alert. Beric was at once taken in charge by his wife and some old people skilled in healing wounds, and laid on a couch of soft skins, while the boys had to tell the story of the battle over and over again to those who had remained behind.

All the rest of the day, scattered bands of the defeated warriors came in until the fort was full to overflowing. Every preparation was made to resist the enemy if they should strike inland, and all that

night an anxious watch was kept. But day after day passed without sign of the Romans, and the spies who were sent out soon discovered that they had no intention of marching through the thick forest. In the open, the soldiers of the legion were a match for anyone, but they feared an ambush in the woods. Two, three weeks passed, and word was brought in that the Romans were preparing to depart.

One damp, foggy morning a party of three trotted down the forest glade towards the coast. The leader was Osweng, the swiftest runner in the valley, and a famous scout, and with him ran Feltor and Hanun. They were going to see what was the latest movement among their enemies. On they went until they came to the edge of the woods above the Roman camp. Here they paused and looked out cautiously into the misty morning, but the open country seemed empty. Osweng, who knew every inch of the coast, now held away to the right, where a high jutting cape overlooked the galleys riding at anchor. When they were within a few yards of the edge of the cliff, they flung themselves on their faces, and crept along until they could peep over the brink. The mists were now rapidly thinning, but sea and shore below still

remained hidden. The Romans seemed very busy. The shouts of the sailors, the rattle of oars in rowlocks, the clash of men moving about in armour, the sharp voices of the officers giving commands all these sounds came up thin and clear through the keen autumn air to the watchers above. Suddenly the mist rolled seawards, and the three on the cliff looked on the shore, then rubbed their eyes, and looked again. It was empty. On glided the mist, flying before a sharp land breeze, and now out of it began to rise masts and sails, and lofty prows of galleys, all, O happy sight, set straight for Gaul. The watchers sprang to their feet, and shouted for joy. The Romans were gone. On rode the ships, the land breeze freshening in their sails, while Feltor and his companions flew back at top speed to spread the glad news that Britain was free of her foes.

[The events related in the preceding story took place in 55 B.C., and Julius Cæsar returned again in 54 B.C. But he did not stay long, and for nearly a hundred years after, the Roman authority over Britain was nothing but a name. Then, in 43 A.D. the Romans attacked Britain in earnest, and, after many years hard fighting, turned it into a Roman province. They were all powerful in Britain for three and a half centuries further, and then were called home to defend their own territories in 410 A.D.]

Bands of Saxon sea-rovers had made inroads on Britain long before the Romans left, and when the legions departed, they swooped down on the country, not merely to plunder and rob, but to seize the land and make their own homes in it. Kent was the first piece of land torn from the Britons. This took place about the middle of the fifth century. About 471 A.D., a band of Saxons—afterwards to be known as the South Saxons, and their kingdom as Sussex—landed at Selsey and fought their way eastwards until they reached the great forest of the Andredsweald, a vast belt of trees, one hundred and twenty miles long, by thirty wide. Here, their progress was checked by the strong fortress of Anderida (Pevensey), which had been built by the Romans, and was bravely defended by the Britons.]



ROMAN SOLDIERS.

THE COMING OF THE SOUTH SAXONS.

I. HOW SERMAT FIRED THE BEACON.

II. THE FALL OF ANDERIDA.

I.

HOW SERMAT FIRED THE BEACON.

THE late afternoon sun was slanting its rays brightly over the great fortress town of Anderida when a band of warriors marched up a wide glade of the vast forest which lay near at hand. The men were dark, powerful fellows, armed with sword and shield, and stepping along gaily, timing their steps to the swing of a war song which their leader chanted in a clear, powerful voice. Beside Elangor, the singer, ran his son Sermat, and, as the trees thinned, Sermat ran eagerly forward to gaze on the walls of the town. When they came out on the meadowlike expanse which lay beneath the walls, the warriors went no further, but flung themselves on the grass to rest.

Miners, and ironworkers from the great forest of the Andredsweald were these men. But now they

had thrown aside their tools and taken their weapons, for every day the fierce Saxons were forcing their way farther inland, and the whole strength of the forest was being brought out to withstand them.

Sermat, too full of wonder and curiosity to remain still, was moving restlessly about, when suddenly he darted forward with a cry of joy. A tall, stately old man was approaching them, his hair and long, venerable beard as white as snow, walking slowly, and ~~leaning on a staff~~.

“Wenegog!” cried the warriors, and sprang to their feet to receive him.

“Oh, grandfather,” said Sermat. “I was wondering where you were.”

Elangor came forward to meet his father whom the infirmities of old age had driven to take refuge in the city, and soon all were listening intently as the old man told the news and the rumours that were flying through the town.

“All the Britons of the forest,” he said, “are gathering for a great blow at the invaders. From all parts of the Andredsweald they have summoned the fighting men just as you have been called. It is said that fresh bands of Saxons are pushing on for the city here. They have been held in check

time and again by our brave fellows on the western side of the forest, who have hidden themselves in the woods by day, and rushed on the foe in the darkness of night. But, in spite of all, day by day they are nearing us, and unless a great blow is dealt to them they will shortly surround the city."

While this talk was going on, Sermat had been lost in wonder again, staring and staring at the great, massive, frowning walls of the fortress, and now he took his grandfather's hand to attract the old man's attention.

"Grandfather," said Sermat, "Who built those walls?"

"Ah, who, my boy," returned the old man, "the mighty Romans built them. Had they but remained in our island these fellows would have never got this grip of the country. Yes, the terrible swords of the legions would soon have made short work of them."

"And you have seen the Romans, grandfather?" pursued the boy. "How wonderful?"

"Yes," said the old man, his eye brightening, "I have seen the Roman legions. Four score years ago is it now, when, as a boy, less than this child," and he laid his hand on Sermat's head, "I watched them crowd into their galleys and

leave our shores for ever. I see them now," continued the stately old man, in a lofty tone of musing, "the famous legionaries clad in shining armour, the eagle standards, the galleys with rows of oars set in order, the crowds upon the shore, and ah, the weeping and wailing, for many were leaving behind wives and children, and dearest friends."

Every one listened in the deepest silence, for of all the men of the wide Andredsweald, old Wene-gog alone had gazed upon the Romans, that mighty people who had done so much for the Britons and left such deep traces over all their land.

At this moment an officer rode up and gave Elangor directions as to the route he and his band must follow, and they prepared for instant departure. Farewells were exchanged, and Wene-gog turned back to the city, while the warriors pressed forward to join the main army. They had been on the march for an hour before Elangor found that his son had slipped among the men.

"You here, Sermat!" he cried, in surprise, "I thought you went to the town with your grandfather."

"Let the lad come," said Heurtan, a burly, greyheaded old warrior, "His feet are nimble and

if we have need to send a message back it will save the loss of a fighting man."

"There is truth in that, Heurtan," replied Elangor, so, to his great delight, Sermat went on with the troop. The dusk was falling when they approached the outposts of the army of the Britons, but they did not join the main body. A horseman met them, gave Elangor a message, and the word of command was given to hold away to the right. A short march brought them to the foot of a steep hill, and up they went. Word was passed through the band that they were to guard the beacon, and in a little while they came out on the hill top where a great pile of light brushwood stood out against the sky.

"What is that for, Heurtan?" said Sermat.

"That," said old Heurtan, "Why, to give warning to the folks in the town."

"But they cannot see this hill from the town."

"No, but there is a rising piece of ground in the forest, which commands this hill, and can be seen from the town as well, being midway between the two. On that there is another such pile as this, and a minute after we clap a light to this heap they will see it, either smoke by day, or flame by night, and then they fire their beacon in turn,

and the watchers on the walls know how matters have gone."

"Whether we have won or lost?" said the boy.

"As for winning," replied Heurtan, "We shall not trouble the beacon for that. Good news may travel as slowly as you like. It is ill news of which you must give early warning, and the beacon will be fired if we come off the worst."

"Will it burn up quickly?" asked Sermat.

"Ay, that it will, lad," said old Heurtan, "oil and resin, and everything that will take fire at once have been used. The men who built that know what they are about. Toss a lighted twig into it anywhere, and away it roars."

Sermat now turned his back upon the pile and looked away into the darkness. He uttered a sharp cry of wonder as he did so.

"Oh, Heurtan, what is that?"

Far, far away to the south-west, a thousand twinkling points of fire shone through the night. They seemed to stand as thick upon the plain as stars in a clear sky, and with as little order.

"They are the camp fires of our enemies," said Heurtan. "By their number the Saxons should be strong indeed. However, they must play the man to-morrow to withstand our onset."

“And where is our army?” asked Sermat.

“We cannot see it,” answered the old warrior.

“Yonder ridge hides it from our view.”

At this moment Elangor called upon Heurtan, and Sermat was left alone. He wandered round the pile, and on the further side, found the two men whose task it was to fire it when word was given. For this purpose, they had a tiny fire of two or three smouldering blocks of turf, lying in the bottom of a hole about a foot deep. This care was observed lest a spark should blow on the pile. Beside the hole lay a few blocks with which to feed the fire. Sermat now heard his name called and ran to old Heurtan who was summoning him.

“Here’s your supper, lad,” said he, handing to Sermat a large piece of barley bread, “and there’s your bed,” and he pointed to a heap of dried grass and heather flung into a hollow of the bank.

Next morning, when Sermat thrust his head out of the heap into which he had burrowed, he found the sun well up and shining brightly over the wide stretch of heathy upland which ran away to the south of the beacon hill. He looked to the quarter where the Saxons lay, but nothing could be seen in that direction, for a faint mist hid the distance. Beyond the ridge rose a tramping of

feet, both of men and horses, mingled with the clash of arms and the cries of the marching Britons.

"Where are they going, Heurtan?" asked Sermat.

"To take position where the hills rise from the lower ground, about three miles south of here," said old Heurtan, "and there stand and fight it out."

Sermat ran to the summit of the ridge, and for nearly two hours watched the army of the Britons marching slowly away, until it reached a lower slope, and he saw it no more. Then he returned to the beacon hill to find those who had been left to guard it perched on the highest point, and gazing eagerly towards the scene of the coming struggle.

They waited long and patiently, and about two hours after mid-day, a low, murmuring sound rolled up to their ears. It sounded like the dash of waves on a distant shore, but the watchers knew well what it was, and the men gripped their weapons tighter, and looked at each other. They knew that the opposing lines of battle had closed in that faint, far-off roar, and that now Briton and Saxon were locked in deadly combat. One, two hours passed, and then signs of the

battle began to be apparent. Wounded men fell back in twos, and threes, making their way as well as they could towards the camp of the previous night, but these, when questioned, could give no decided account of the chances of victory. The battle, as they had seen it, still swayed to and fro with equal fortune. Hour after hour slipped by, and the noise of the stubbornly contested field still rose to the listening band. The dusk was drawing on, when a warrior, who had been sent out to search for news, ran back at full speed.

“Elangor,” he cried, “a party of the Saxons are close at hand. They are marching direct for the beacon here.”

Every man sprang to his weapons, and the band hurried down the hill. As they did so, the dying evening light flashed on the spears and shining battle axes of a body of Saxons emerging from a woody hollow to the left.

“Shall I fire the beacon, Elangor?” shouted one of the watchmen.

“No, no,” replied Elangor. “We do not know yet how the main battle has gone.”

Raising their war cry, the Britons rushed upon their foes, and the latter, closing their line, swung aloft their great axes and waited in firm

array. The two parties crashed together in desperate struggle, and almost as they did so, it became apparent how the battle had gone. Of a sudden, the country became full of flying men, and galloping horses, and pursuing Saxons. The band which had been marching to capture the beacon, of which their scouts had given them warning, was but a little ahead of the general retreat of the Britons, and Sermat heard his father shouting from the midst of the clanging blows.

“The beacon ! Fire the beacon !”

Sermat turned and ran to warn the watchmen. But what was that line of figures clear against the evening sky, surrounding the beacon pile.

Two troops of Saxons had closed in, one upon each side, and, either the watchmen had been surprised and slain, or had left their post to join Elangor, for the enemy were in complete possession of the summit, and were hastily disposing themselves in a circle around the beacon to prevent it being fired.

Straight up the hill went Sermat, gliding on his naked feet like a shadow through the patches of gorse which clothed its sides. He stayed an instant under the last clump of bushes and looked carefully before him. He was now within

thirty yards of the beacon, and the two Saxon warriors nearest to him were several paces apart. Sermat bounded from his hiding place, and flew for the gap. So swiftly and silently did the boy dart forward, and so different was his figure from anything which the Saxons had expected as an enemy that he took them entirely by surprise.

But only for an instant. Both sprang towards him, and their terrible axes whistled through the air, to swing harmlessly behind Sermat who had passed them like the wind. The boy rushed on round the pile, unseen, for, on the cry of warning, everyone looked outwards for the foe, never dreaming of the little form gliding at their backs. Sermat stooped at the hole, and the sharp smell of the smouldering turf caught his nostrils. Without an instant's delay he thrust in his arm, seized the block of living fire with his naked hand, and hurled it full into the waiting pile. He drew in one deep, shuddering breath of pain, then leapt away for the darkness and safety.

As he did so, up and through the pile ran the fire first, with a sputtering hiss, then, with a roar and an instant sheet of flame. This outburst of the beacon proved the source of safety to Sermat. He was trapped in the ring of Saxon guards, but

the sudden happening of that which they were set there to prevent, so astonished and bewildered them, that he was through them and flying down the hill, before they recovered their presence of



SERMAT PASSED THEM LIKE THE WIND.

mind. At the foot of the hill, Sermat nearly ran against a hobbling figure.

“Ah, lad, is that you?” cried Heurtan’s voice.

“Yes, Heurtan, what is the matter? Are you hurt?”

“Something of that sort. One of those fellows gave me a slash across the thigh, and it’s no help to running away.” The old warrior chuckled grimly, and plodded on, leaning heavily on a spear haft.

“Where is my father?” cried Sermat.

“Safe and sound, the last I saw of him,” replied Heurtan. “He came off without a touch, and was gathering together what he could of our men to cover the retreat. But I knew I could do no more, and so I marched. But who fired the beacon? That was a lucky stroke indeed.”

Sermat told his story, and old Heurtan stopped his hobbling for a moment to clap his great, hard hands together, and shout in delight. Suddenly, the thud of a horse’s feet pounding over the turf came to their ears, and they looked back, then slipped into the bushes. But, as the horseman came nearer, they recognised him in the red light of the beacon, and shouted “Woerex.”

The rider drew rein, and they stepped from their shelter.

“Heurtan and Sermat,” cried the other. “And you, Heurtan, are wounded.”

“How is it with you, Woerex?” said Sermat.

“Not touched,” returned the youngman, springing

down, "but I came across this riderless horse, and luckily too, as it seems. Up with you, old comrade."

"Nay, lads, save yourselves," said Heurtan.

"That is what we wish," said Woerex. "But I know nothing of the paths on this side of the forest, nor does Sermat. So you must be our guide and we will run at your side."

"That is true," said Heurtan, climbing slowly and painfully to the back of the horse. "I know every inch of this country, day or night. We must make straight for Anderida."

At this moment, a wave of the retreat surged up behind them, shrieks and outcries of the flying Britons, and triumphant shouts of the pursuing Saxons. The startled horse plunged forward, Heurtan gave him his head, and away they dashed, straight for the sheltering darkness of the great forest.

II.

THE FALL OF ANDERIDA.

SERMAT lay at full length on the wall of Anderida, feeling very hungry. It was nearly twenty-four hours since he had tasted food, for there was only enough in the town to allow of one meal a day, and the time for it had not yet arrived. He, and Heurtan, and Woerex had got safely within the gates of the great fortress on the night of the flight, but the next day, the whole Saxon host had surrounded Anderida on every side, cutting off all chance, either of escape from the town, or of help being supplied from without.

The blockade had now lasted so long, and the Saxons had been so watchful that no food should pass their lines, that great distress existed in Anderida. It was the only way open to the Saxons to force the town to surrender. They had no engines of war with which to batter a breach in those massive walls. They had leapt from their long ships to the British shore, armed with axe, sword, and shield. But these weapons, all conquering in face of the foe, were of no avail against

the vast ramparts which the mighty Romans had flung up around the great fortress town.

So they maintained unsleeping watch and ward, biding their time and awaiting their opportunity. Time and again, the brave Britons, cooped up within the walls, had dashed out against their foes, but sally after sally had failed, and the grim courage of the Saxon warriors held their iron line unbroken around the doomed city.

Sermat now heard the sound of footsteps behind him. He looked round, and saw Heurtan and Wenegog, coming up the narrow steps which led to that part of the wall. Near at hand a watchman paced up and down to give warning should anyone approach from without.

Heurtan walked with a slight limp, for though his wound had completely healed under the care of Wenegog, who was very skilful in such matters, yet he would never again move as nimbly as before.

Woerex was not with them now. He had taken part in one of the first sallies by which the Britons attempted to break the encircling line, and had never returned. Whether the brave young warrior had died in the fierce struggle, or fallen into the hands of the Saxons, his friends within the town knew not. They only knew that when the

defeated Britons had fled back pell-mell to the refuge of the walls, Woerex had not come with them.

Heurtan and Wenegog sat down on the wall, and looked long, and earnestly, at the Saxon encampment, half-a-mile away. The murmur of the host came clearly to their ears, all the clearer for the silence of the town behind them. The hum of busy Anderida had long ceased. The hammer of the workman was silent, the clatter of the market-place was hushed, the hand of starvation was laid on the great town, and under its grim touch everything was mute.

"How far is the end now, Wenegog?" said Heurtan, in a low voice.

"If the sally of to-night fails," said the old man, "all is lost. Even now food is running short for the fighting men, and if they can no longer be fed who is to defend the city?"

There was silence again for a few minutes, then Heurtan spoke.

"From which gate do they set out?"

"From the eastern gate. It is the nearest to the forest."

"Is not that the gate near which we live, grandfather?" asked Sermat.

“It is,” said Wenegog. “We shall see them depart.”

“I trust the Saxons have no idea of what’s afoot,” said Heurtan. “It is beyond a doubt that they were prepared for our last onset. Some deserting traitor must have carried the news.”

“Hunger is a hard taskmaster,” said Wenegog.

“Ay, ay, but to earn a full meal at the price of the overthrow of our hopes, and death to our brave fellows is a price indeed,” returned Heurtan.

“The guards are doubled all round the walls this time,” said Wenegog, “the gates are watched day and night, and we can do no more.”

Later in the day, as evening was drawing on, Sermat was returning home along the wide passage which ran at the foot of the wall. The Captain of the Guard at the gate near which he lived had sent him with a message to the opposite side of the town, and he was hurrying back to be in time to see the warriors depart upon their last great attempt to break the Saxon lines. Not far from home, he came, to his great surprise, upon a part of the wall which seemed unguarded. The sky was still bright with the evening light, but no figure of a watchman stood out against it. But, as Sermat looked, a figure appeared climbing out to the top.

“Oh! there he is,” thought Sermat, but the man’s motions were so curious that he stopped to watch him. The figure bent down as if fastening something, then slipped out of sight on the farther side of the wall. Sermat instantly thought of the spies of which he had heard his grandfather and Heurtan talk, and hurried up to the place. Yes, it was as he had fancied. A strong, thick rope was hanging down outside the wall, secured by a loop passed round a projecting stone on the inner side of the rampart. No sign was visible of the figure he had seen.

“He has slipped down and run away to the forest,” thought Sermat, and he began dragging the rope up at once. He saw the danger of leaving it, for where a man had gone down another might come up.

When he had pulled up the rope, he ran away, leaving it in coils on the top of the wall, and sought his grandfather. The house in which old Wenegog lived had been in the old Roman days the residence of a high official, but it had come down to meaner uses, and was inhabited by a colony of the poorer sort. It was a lofty, solidly-built house with a broad, flat roof, and here Sermat found the old man and Heurtan, looking down upon

the warriors gathering below. Sernat told what he had seen, and Heurtan hurried away to warn the captain of the guard. But, after a while he returned, unsuccessful.

"I cannot get speech of him," said Heurtan. "He is busied with a thousand things, and, after all, this sally will settle affairs. One or two slipping either in or out of the city can make but little difference to matters as they stand now."

Sernat was hanging over the parapet and gazing eagerly at the open space before the gate. Down there, between the lofty houses and the high wall it was already dark, and a few, flaming torches cast a smoky light by which the warriors formed themselves into ranks.

From every window, from every roof top, a crowd of pale, anxious faces peered down at them. For so great a concourse it was strangely silent. The spirit of defeat seemed to hang over them. The usual gay clash and clang inseparable from the movements of armed men came only in low and fitful bursts, showing that they were not taking their positions with the proud confidence and strong, firm step of the soldier who believes himself marching to victory.

The rattle of bolts and the creaking of the great

gates drew Sermat's eyes in that direction. The keepers were slowly drawing them open, and, as they did so, the front line of the Britons moved forward at the word of command.

The van of the out-going troops had reached the middle of the gate, filling the pathway from side to side, when a dreadful shout arose from without. Every heart stood still in terror. It was the war cry of the Saxons, the terrible Ahoi! Ahoi!; and in another instant the front rank of the Britons recoiled in utter confusion, as they were driven back before the sudden rush of their enemies.

But the Britons, fierce in their despair, recovered themselves at once, and a furious battle was joined in the very mouth of the gate.

The night had now fallen dark, and, for a while, the combatants knew not each other, but struck out wildly at random. But light was soon forthcoming. Torches were kindled by the Saxons outside the wall and flung over the heads of their comrades fighting in the front ranks. Blazing fagots were held aloft on the points of long lances, and thrust against the gates to fire them. From these fagots, daubed as they were with oil and pitch, great sheets of bright flame leapt forth,

and cast a strong glare over the mad medley of combat in the gate.

As the light burst out, everyone looked anxiously to see how it fared with their brave comrades below.



WATCHING THE BATTLE IN THE GATE.

“Ah,” cried old Wenegog, pointing with his trembling finger, “See them, ah, see them, the Berserkers, the dreadful Berserkers.”

Yes, there they were, the mad fighters, the men who dreaded nothing, the men who hugged danger

to their bosom as a friend. The front rank of the Saxons, the band now bearing the brunt of the battle, was composed of some five-and-twenty gigantic warriors, bare-headed to a man, some clothed in a coarse linen shirt, others naked to the waist, and all fighting with a fury which held the Britons in desperate play. They were of different ages, from tall, fair young men with bright hair, to old, grizzled warriors scarred with the tokens of many a fight, but one in the furious valour with which they hurled their naked bodies upon the Britons clad in shining armour.

Most of the Berserkers were armed with huge battle-axes, but some of the elder men carried great hammers, with which they struck down foeman after foeman, smiting great sparks from the helmets and breastplates of their opponents. But the very pick of the Britons had been placed

[Among the Old English were to be found men of such fierce and dauntless courage, that they scorned the advantage of defensive armour, but rushed bare-sark—that is, bare of their *shirt* of mail—upon their foes. We still use the work and speak of “Berserk rage,” by which we understand a course of action, where the actor dashes upon his opponents with a careless and desperate fury, recking nothing of the wounds he receives himself, so that he inflicts injury upon his enemy.]

in the van, and they fought as all brave men fight when standing at bay.

“Ahoi ! Ahoi !” The wild, Berserk scream rises high above the din of battle, high above the shrill outcries of the watching Britons.

“Ahoi ! Ahoi !” The dripping battle-axes, the ponderous hammers rise and fall, and the fierce, blue, Saxon eyes gleam and shine in the red light of the dancing flames, and the long, yellow hair floats behind, as they spring and strike home again and again.

“Ahoi ! Ahoi !” The deep, rolling, long echoing cry bursts from ten thousand Saxon throats, as they see the Britons—brave men, but over-matched—waver and give ground before the furious onset of the mighty Berserk champions.

“Ahoi ! Ahoi !” The Britons break, and fly, and like a resistless flood, the Saxon hosts pour into the doomed city, fire and sword in hand.

As the invaders dashed in, a loud groan burst from the watching multitude before they turned and sought safety in flight.

“Anderida is lost, is lost,” cried ^{مع} old Wenegog in a mournful voice.

“Come, then,” said Heurtan, “We must save ourselves, and Sermat’s rope shall do it.”

They were in no immediate danger, for the house had only one opening on the street, a small strong door, now securely barricaded. As they hurried downstairs, battle-axes thundered heavily upon this, and women began to scream.

"Silence, and make for the door behind," shouted Heurtan. "There is fifteen minutes' work for them at yonder entrance. Use it as well as you may."

Sermat led the way rapidly to the wall and found the rope just as he had left it. That part of Anderida was silent and deserted, for every one had made a rush to the gates on the opposite side of the town, in hope of escape. The uproar near the entrance which the Saxons had forced was deafening, and was spreading rapidly. Heurtan saw that the loop was safe around the projecting stone, then dropped the rope.

"Down you go, Sermat," said he.

Sermat slipped over the edge of the wall, and slid down easily.

"I am on the ground, Heurtan," he called out, "the rope just touches it."

"Go, Heurtan," he heard his grandfather saying above. "I cannot descend thus, and, after all, at my age, what matters it?"

“And think you, father Wenegog,” laughed Heurtan, “that I will go and leave the oldest and wisest of our blood to be slain by the sea wolves? No, no. You have plenty of strength left to cling to my shoulders, which is far easier than hanging by a rope, and if I cannot let myself down twenty feet with you on my back, may I never again be called ‘Heurtan of the Strong Arm,’ Sermat,” he continued, “look out below, and hold the rope steady so that I can feel it with my feet.”

Sermat did as he was bid, and, in a few moments saw a black mass moving slowly and carefully down towards him.

“Safe and sound,” said Heurtan, as his feet touched the ground, and he set the old man down.

“Which way now, Wenegog?”

“Straight before us,” said the latter. “We are now about half way between two gates. Right or left we may run into danger.”

In a few minutes they were close upon the encircling encampment, and they moved very gently and cautiously. Sermat ran ahead, as a scout, but returned quickly.

“The camp is empty,” he said, “I have been among the little huts which they have built, and there is no one there.”

They went on, and found that the boy spoke truly. The evening watch fires were blazing and crackling merrily, in a perfect solitude. The triumphant roar with which the Saxons had swept into the city had drawn the watchmen from the camp, to share in the sack and plunder. They passed quickly through the firelight to the darkness beyond, and pushed on, as rapidly as Wenegog could travel, for their forest home. They had been marching about two hours, when suddenly they heard voices in front. They stopped and listened eagerly. What language was it? Were they Saxons or Britons? The sound came again.

"Friends, friends," cried Heurtan. "It is our own tongue." And he shouted to them. An answering voice now rang down the forest glade, and, on hearing it, the fugitives uttered cries of joy.

"Elangor, my son," said old Wenegog.

"Father, father," shouted Sermat. The two parties rushed towards each other, and, for a moment, the dangers amidst which they stood were forgotten in the pleasure of such a meeting. Then Elangor and his companions listened breathlessly while old Wenegog told of the capture of Anderida.

"Our land is lost then," said Elangor. "We must say farewell to the Forest. If the Saxons

have seized Anderida we can hold out no longer. But where can we go ? ”

“ To Wankard of *Caer y Graig, north of the †Tafwys,” said Wenegog, “ our ancient friendship will win us welcome.”

“ You are right, father,” said Elangor. “ We have no other refuge.”

Several of the small, wiry ponies of the forest breed were with Elangor’s men, and Wenegog was placed on one of these. The party turned northwards, marching by the stars, and, as they went, Elangor told how he had escaped from the battle, but failed to reach the town, and since, with the remnants of his band, had been hanging on the outskirts of the Saxon camp.

An hour later, they marched over a ridge far to the north of the town. On the top they paused and looked behind. The sky was red above from the city burning below. Anderida was a mere blot of flame in the darkness.

“ There burns our last hope,” said the venerable old man. “ The Saxon is now the master of our country. We have done what we could, but our struggles have been in vain, Come, my children,

* Caer y Graig means “ The Fortress of the Rock.”

† Tafwys, the British name for the Thames.

we must seek afar the safety denied us in our homes. Let us go !”

With a last, long look towards their beloved Forest, now hidden in the distant gloom, the little band crossed the ridge, and plunged into the valley beyond and hurried northwards through the night.

[Many other bands of invaders came sailing across the North Sea, and, landing on the south and east coasts, attacked the Britons and drove them westwards, until the latter held no land except in the extreme west of the island. These bands had many different tribal names, such as *Gewissas*, and *Hwiccas*, and so on, but, in the main, they belonged to one or other of three great divisions, viz. :—The Angles, who came from districts we now call Schleswig and Holstein, to the South of Denmark ; the Saxons who lived near the mouths of the Weser and Elbe, and in Friesland ; and the Jutes from Jutland, which lies in the north of Denmark. At first, each of these bands formed a separate kingdom of its own, wherever its members happened to settle, thus the East Saxons founded Essex ; the West Saxons, Wessex ; the Angles, East Anglia, and Mercia, and Northumbria. But very soon these kingdoms began to fight with each other, to see which should be chief among them, and, by the year 828 A.D., it became clear that Wessex, the great kingdom of the south of England, was to take the lead. While this struggle for supremacy was going on, Christianity had been introduced by St. Augustine in

597 A.D., and had spread over the whole of England. But the English were now about to suffer just as they had made the Britons suffer. Great bands of Vikings crossed the North Sea to attack England, just as the Angles and Saxons themselves had done, three hundred years before. The general name of Danes was given to these invaders, though they did not all come from Denmark, many being Norwegians, Swedes, and Jutes. They began to trouble England in 787 A.D., and becoming bolder, as they found that much rich plunder was to be had, assailed the country on all sides. At first, they confined themselves to raids, retiring to their own land with their spoils, but in 851 A.D., a band wintered in Thanet, and from this date they began to seize land and make settlements. They found no difficulty in doing this in many parts of the country, but the kings of Wessex stood out boldly against them, and prevented them from conquering all England. The most famous king of Wessex was Alfred the Great, who reigned from 871 A.D. Many stories are told of Alfred, how he learned to read, how he grew up brave, and clever, and thoughtful, how he struggled against the Danes. With the latter, he fought battle after battle, but in 878 A.D., he was compelled to fly before them.



KING ALFRED LEARNING TO READ.

ALFRED AND THE DANES.

I. THE STRANGER.

II. THE KING.

III. THE DANES.

I.

THE STRANGER.

“HEY, Asc, run, run ! Good dog,” cried Osric, as shaggy, long-legged Asc bounded in front of the herd of pigs just making a rush down the wrong path. The pigs knew Asc very well, and knew also how his sharp, white teeth felt when he snapped at their ears, and so they turned and bolted in the opposite direction,

“Mind, Hilda !” shouted the boy, and away ran his sister, her bare, brown feet flying over the forest turf, as she headed them off from a fresh track which did not lead towards home. Finding themselves baffled once more, the grunting herd gave up for the present their designs of running away, and marched slowly along the glade, Osric, Hilda, and Asc following at their heels.

Every day Osric and his sister drove their herd of about fifty swine to pasture in the forest, and in the wide marshes which spread about their island home in the fens of Somerset, and every day they had to run, and plan, and watch carefully, against the surprises which the cunning pigs prepared for them.

Now, they went half-a-mile or more without trouble, then they began their nightly planning as to how they should pass the Great Oak. The Great Oak stood alone in the midst of an open space where half-a-dozen paths met. The road home turned up the hill, but the children knew well that that was the very last way which the pigs would take.

Osric gave a command to the dog, and Asc, who understood the business in hand as well as any one, took a turn to the left, ready to stop the rush which the pigs were sure to make for the track which ran down to the marsh, while Hilda drew away to the right to block another path. Osric remained at the rear of the herd and urged them on.

Slowly and steadily they went forward, crossing the open ground straight for home just like innocent, obedient sheep, instead of the artful and designing creatures that they were. Suddenly, at the very

moment the boy and girl thought themselves safe, away went their charges full speed for the marsh. But Asc was there, ready to meet them, so round whirled the pigs and made off in another direction.

Hilda was the nearest to them, and she ran with all her might. Osric ran too, but the pigs were too quick, and were just slipping away between them when a man with a long staff made his appearance at the mouth of the path for which the animals were rushing.

He checked the pigs, and drove them back, and now, since every other way was cut off to them, they marched home without delay. So busy were the children with their troublesome task, that until they found themselves safely climbing the little hill upon which their house stood, they had not a moment to spare to look at the newcomer.

When they glanced up at him to thank him for his help, they started in surprise. It was not, as they had thought, one of their neighbours, who had turned up at a lucky moment, but an utter stranger. He saw their surprise, and also the girl's fear, for a stranger might be an enemy, and he smiled.

“Do not be frightened.” said he, “I am a friend.”

His pleasant smile, and deep, sweet voice

instantly reassured them, and they moved nearer to him.

“She thought that perhaps you were one of those wicked Danes, of whom we have heard so much,” said Osric, taking his sister’s hand.

“No,” said the stranger. “I am not a Dane, I am a true Englishman, and love my country beyond anything else.”

“Have you ever seen the Danes?” asked the boy.

The stranger threw back his head and laughed.

“Ay, ay, my boy,” he said, “I have seen the Danes. What is the name of this place, and who lives here?”

“It is our house,” said Osric, “and we call it Ash Topp.”

They had now climbed the gentle slope, and stood before the children’s home. The pigs, without any further bidding, marched into a kind of fold with mud walls, and lay contentedly down upon heaps of rushes scattered there. The stranger and Osric made fast the gate through which the pigs had gone, then turned towards the house. The latter was low, and long, built of large, rude pieces of timber, plastered with clay, and a roof of thatch, supplied by the rushes which grew in great quantities in the fen hard by.

As they approached, the master of the house appeared at the door, Hilda clasping his hand. He gave the stranger a hearty Old English welcome, and flung the strong, iron-banded door wide back for him to enter.

Inside, a great wood fire was burning on the broad hearth, and in the chimney corner, stood a settle, spread comfortably with skins. The settle had one occupant already, a well-to-do farmer of the neighbourhood, and he looked with much surprise to see the newcomer, with his poor and dusty clothes, step quietly forward, and sit down by his side with no more than a grave bend of the head.

Hilda came to the opposite side of the fire to look shyly at the stranger, who was spreading his hands over the leaping flames. He was a young man, about thirty years of age, tall and straight, and bearing himself like a soldier. His calm, grave, handsome face, his clear, strong, steady eyes, his long, beautiful golden hair, the smooth, shapely hands, which he held over the fire, all these formed a strange contrast to his mean attire.

Looking upon him you would have said, "Here is a man who will never be moved aside when he has resolved on his purpose," and after a moment,

you would have added, "Nor will there be need to move him, for his purpose is sure to be good." But Gurth, the neighbour, saw nothing but the old clothes, he did not see the man inside them.

"He wants not assurance," said Gurth, looking round on Godrith, Hilda's father. "He sits himself down in the place of honour when a stool drawn up to the other side of the fire would have served his turn well enough."

"I did not intend to presume, friend," said the stranger, mildly. "I ask pardon if I have given offence. 'Tis true, I look poor. But I have come by my poverty in a fashion common enough in our day, more's the pity. I have lost my all, fighting against the Danes."

"And are you sorry?" asked Hilda, coming to his side.

"Sorry, my little girl," cried he, putting his arm round Hilda, "Oh, no! Had I a thousand times as much to lose, I would struggle till the whole was spent sooner than give up a foot of English land to the enemy."

"Well said, stranger!" roared Godrith, striking the table with his fist. "Well said, indeed! And, look ye, neighbour Gurth, if ye cannot keep your sharp tongue between your teeth, e'en begone with

it. It shames my hospitality to hear such words spoken of an unoffending man. If he hath fought for our land, then the warmest corner by my fire and the best fare on my board is his. Perhaps you can tell us something of how the fighting has gone?" he continued to the stranger.

"I can," said the latter. "I have taken part in every battle of the last seven years."

"There, now," cried Godrith. "Think of that! Tell us the whole story, man. We are out of the way of news, and, except that these bloodthirsty Danes have done much mischief to the country, we know but little."

"Willingly," said the stranger, and looked into the fire as if collecting his thoughts. Gurth had risen with an offended air, upon Godrith speaking so plainly to him, and moved as if to go. But the chance of hearing news was too much for him, and so he gave a tug or two at the skins as if he had only got up to put them straight. He sat down again and the stranger began.

"It is now seven years since our own kingdom of Wessex had to face the Danes in earnest. Before that, they had been doing much harm in other parts of England, and we had known them in Wessex, too. But it was in eight hundred and seventy-one

that they attacked us with the avowed intention of over-running and capturing our country. And they kept us fully employed, for we fought six battles in the year."

"Six battles!" cried Godrith.

"Six desperate battles," said the stranger. "besides many smaller encounters. At Englefield, the Danes won. At Reading, and at Ashdown, near Reading, they were beaten. Then the English lost the day at Basing, and at Merton, and in the last battle the King was badly wounded, and soon died." The speaker's voice fell into a low, sad tone, and he paused for a moment.

"Ay, ay," said Godrith. "Ethelred, that was, and then came Alfred, our present King."

"Yes," said the stranger, "Alfred fought the sixth battle at Wilton, where victory hung between the two parties. After that, a truce was made, for both sides were exhausted by the struggle. The Danes went away from Wessex, and strengthened their position in Mercia and Northumbria, and for some years things were fairly quiet as far as we were concerned. Then, two years ago, in eight hundred and seventy-six, the great Danish leader, Guthrum, attacked us. After some fighting another truce was made, but last year the

Danes rushed on Exeter, and there they were blockaded, and still another agreement was entered into with them. But instead of keeping their word, no sooner did they find themselves free, than they swarmed into Wessex, and our people, worn out by the strife, have given way before them in all directions."

There was a pause for a few moments, and then Godrith asked, "And is it true, what we have heard about the savage doings of these wild folk from over the sea." The stranger raised his hand, and shook his head sorrowfully.

"Dreadful, dreadful," said he, "they leave the country a desert behind them wherever they move. Villages plundered and burnt, the inhabitants slaughtered or fled, animals killed or driven away, not a living thing remains to tell what a place was like before the Danes arrived."

"I have heard, too," said Godrith, "That they are heathens to a man."

"That is true," returned the stranger, "and if they hold a grudge against any one thing more than another, I believe it is against the Christian religion. Monastery after monastery, church after church have they sacked and burnt, and slain or driven away the clergy. Teachers, knowledge,

books, all are gone. In a year or two we can repair our shattered dwellings, and make new tools, and raise fresh crops, but, oh, how slowly can we make good our losses in higher and greater things.* So clean has learning gone out of the land that very few clergy this side of the Humber can understand the meaning of their own Latin service books, or translate aught out of Latin into English."

The stranger became silent, and his listeners sighed to hear of the desolation which had fallen upon their country, then Godrith spoke again.

"And what next?" said he.

"It is hard to say," replied the stranger, "but I do not believe we shall be beaten in the end. I am certain that our people will take heart again shortly, and that we shall succeed in freeing our land."

"And thou shalt stay with us as long as thou wilt," cried Godrith, "and rest from thy long journeyings and fightings."

"And what, pray, can he do to make his lodging good?" asked sharp-tongued Aldytha, Godrith's wife.

"Why, dame," said the stranger, "I can——." His glance travelled round the place as if wondering

* The conclusion of the paragraph is in the actual words of Alfred himself as they have come down to us.

what share he could take in the labour of that dwelling, when his eye fell on a dusty harp hanging against the further wall, "I can play on the harp to amuse you, at any rate," he went on, smiling.

"H'm, had you said you could help the good-man in the fields, it would have been more to our purpose," said Aldytha.

"Nay, good wife," said Godrith, "a merry stave is something. I love one above all things. But since old Alred, the gleeman, died, and left his harp to me, it hath hung idly there for none of us can handle it."

While his father was speaking, Osric had run to the wall, and lifted down the harp. He cleaned off the thick of the dust with a handful of rushes and carried it to the stranger, who began to tune and try it in the fashion of one who was master of the art. Then he struck the strings with a firm, sure touch, and the most beautiful music rang through the house. After playing a little, he began to sing, and his full, rich voice blended so perfectly with the strong, sweet notes of the harp that his hearers listened in breathless delight. He sang brave old songs of the great deeds of their forefathers, and, as he sang, the spirits of those present rose again from the sorrow into which the cruel deeds of the Danes had plunged them.

II.

THE KING.

ONE evening, three weeks later, Osric, Hilda, and Asc were coming home once more from the forest, and as they drew near the Great Oak, they found their new friend waiting, as he did every evening, to help them past the awkward place. When the pigs were safely headed into the path towards home, the boy and girl hung on either side of him, and they went, talking, up the slope.

“Alfred,” said Hilda, “you will stay with us always, won’t you?”

“Always is a long time, Hilda,” said their friend. “And besides, we may be called to face the Danes any day.”

“You have the same name as our great king,” said Osric. “I thought of it just now when Hilda spoke.”

“So have many more,” said the tall, young man, laughing, “Alfred is a very common English name.”

“And you have often been with the king in the battle?” pursued the boy.

“Often and often,” said he.



ALFRED THE GREAT
Statue by Henry Thompson, R.A.

“Tell us about the king,” said little Hilda. “Is he not brave, and good, and noble?”

Alfred smiled, and laid his hand on her shoulder. “I do not know whether he really deserves so much praise as that,” said he, “but I know enough of him to be sure that he loves his country and his people, and that he desires nothing for himself, and everything for them.”

When they went indoors, they found Aldytha turning over a horse-collar, and fuming to herself. No sooner did they appear than she burst forth: “Well of all the unhandy fellows that ever came about this homestead, I think, stranger, you are the worst.”

“What’s to do now wife?” said Godrith, entering behind them.

“What’s to do?” cried Aldytha. “Why, I gave him some strips of leather and a pack needle to mend this horse-collar, and just look at the botch he has made of it.”

She held up the piece of harness as she spoke, and, in truth, it was a sorry job. Alfred eyed it in good-humoured penitence.

“Indeed, dame,” he said, “It is a poor piece of work, but I never essayed such a task before. I shall do it better next time.”

“Better next time,” cried she, “I’ll take care you meddle with no like work again here. Such a useless pair of hands as yours I never did see. There’s not a single thing at which we set you, but it’s the same story. You’ve no more idea how to set about it than a child, and where you were born and brought up I don’t know, but for sure it was in some idle, good-for-nothing place.”

“Certainly I had no opportunity of learning how to stitch a horse collar,” said Alfred. “It was all done for me, and so, I am but a bungler now.”

“Ay, and everything else was done for you I should think,” rated Aldytha, “for you’re no use in the world for lending a hand to poor work folk.”

Suddenly, Godrith held up his forefinger.

“Hist!” he cried. “What is that?”

Everyone stood still and listened. So loudly had Aldytha been giving her opinion of their guest that several riders had cantered up to the door unheard, and there was a clatter of hoofs upon the stones before the house.

In another instant, a face looked in at the window. This was a mere, square hole in the wall, closed at night with a wooden shutter, but the shutter was still hanging back.

“It is he,” said the man at the window, and the

door was flung open, and several people entered. All were soldiers, and the foremost was a tall, stately person, richly dressed, the red light of the fire flashing brightly back from his polished armour and ornaments of gold. Never in their lives had the people of Ash Topp seen such a splendid figure, and what was their surprise when they saw this warrior drop upon one knee, and humbly kiss the hand which their ragged guest extended towards him.

“My dear master,” said the kneeling man, “We have found you at last.”

“My good Oswald,” said Alfred, “How glad I am to see you again!”

Full of wonder at the sight of this great Saxon noble, for such his appearance betokened him, kneeling at the feet of their guest, and awed by the stately, commanding air with which the latter looked over the new-comers bending before him, the people of the house retreated to the further side of the room.

This brought them near to the window through which two or three soldiers of lower rank were peeping.

“Who is he?” whispered Godrith to one of them.

“Who is he!” returned the soldier. “Has he been staying here and ye did not know? The King!”

“The King! The King!” murmured Aldytha, trembling. “And I have scolded him up hill and down dale. I might have known he was no common man for he knew nothing of household gear. Last week he let the bread burn, and then——”

“Peace, wife, peace,” said Godrith. “Ye are in no danger. The noble Alfred bears no grudge in his mind for such matters. Here he comes. Kneel to him. Kneel to him.”

“Nay, nay,” said he, “Let Alfred the King sleep yet a while, and be not afraid Godrith and Aldytha to talk freely with Alfred your guest and bungling servant. Now,” he continued, stroking Hilda’s bright hair, “I will read your secret hearts, my hosts, and you shall tell me if I do not read them true. Would not your dearest wish be fulfilled if the *folkland around Ash Topp became

* Much of the land among the Old English was folkland, that is, free to all. But the King and his council of Wise Men—the Witan—could give grants out of this land, to become private property. Such a grant was called bookland, as it was held by book, or deed.

bookland and remained a possession to you and your heirs for ever."

"My gracious lord," said Godrith, "I know not how you have discovered it, but such is the truth."

"It shall be done," said Alfred. "Five hides of land shall be yours. I will undertake the matter myself. And now, I must leave you. There is a chance to make head against the Danes once more, and it must be embraced."

† "Five hides of land!" cried Godrith in wondering delight, "Five hides of land! O happy day! O noble king! Wife, fetch me my thick leathern jerkin. I will get sword and shield at once, and follow his banner. Shame fall on our house if I strike not a blow for our country and generous master."

Alfred turned to talk again with his followers, while Aldytha, scarcely able to believe her own ears, made ready for her husband's departure.

In a short time the train marched away, and Osric and Hilda, after watching them disappear into the woods ran back to talk over their new fortune

† Five hides of land would be about six hundred acres, and its possession would give its holder the rank of Thane, which was the title for a Saxon nobleman.

with their mother, and to wonder when their father would return.

A week later, Osric left Ash Topp in the morning, mounted on a small, shaggy pony, which bore also two great bags, one on either side, and both well filled with provisions for Godrith. Alfred had formed a camp some distance away, and thither the English were gathering steadily. Osric trotted on through woods and over wide heaths until, about three o'clock in the afternoon, he came upon the outposts of the English camp. The first man whom he met Osric knew very well, for he lived near Ash Topp, and this man conducted the boy to a part of the camp where Godrith was busy fashioning spear handles.

“Ay, ay,” said Godrith, as he turned out the contents of the bags. “Here is good fare, indeed. The king would like a bite of this, I’ll warrant, for its like hath not been in camp lately.”

“Oh, father, can I see the king?” said Osric. “Do you think he would remember me?”

Godrith laughed, and packed up some of the best of the food, and they went towards the tent which had been pitched for Alfred’s use. Outside the tent they saw Alfred and a group of his chief men in deep consultation. As they approached,

Alfred turned and saw them, and smiled, as Godrith made his presentation of food.

“Willingly we will taste your dame’s cookery, Godrith,” said he, “for we make but poor work of it, we men in these woods.”

One of Alfred’s counsellors stepped forward and laid his hand on Osric’s shoulder.

“Here, my liege,” said he, “here is what you need to make your character complete. These strolling harpers have ever a boy with them, to carry their harp, and their wallet. It were well for you to fail in no particular. For if you should be suspected and discovered, what will become of us and our land?”

“There is much truth in your words, Clapa,” said Alfred, and he turned to Godrith; “Will you venture the lad with me, Godrith?” said the king. “It will be a perilous errand. I intend to go into the Danish camp to discover their plans as far as possible.”

“The boy is yours, my liege,” replied Godrith. “If he can serve you in any way, I shall be the prouder.”

“But who will answer for the boy?” said one of the Thanes in the group. “It is a great trust we are committing to him, the knowledge that his companion is the king.”

"That will I do myself," said Alfred. "Osric is an old acquaintance, and I know him to be trustworthy."

Osric's heart swelled proudly as he listened to this conversation. To accompany the King, to help in a dangerous venture, to take a share in the struggle for freedom now going forward, the idea that he was chosen for the task filled him with pride and delight.

"And what does Osric himself say?" continued Alfred, turning to the boy.

Osric fell upon his knee and caught up two stalks of parched corn from the gift of food. "I will be true to you, O King," said he, "as long as corn grows in the fields." And the simplicity and earnestness of his pledge touched them all.

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III.

THE DANES.

AN hour later, three figures left the camp and slipped into the woods. First marched Ailred of the Swift Foot, a famous scout, and one who knew every inch of the dangerous country which lay between the Saxon and Danish camps, then came Osric, bearing the King's harp, and lastly Alfred himself.

The Danes were only six miles away, but short as was the distance, the English had no fear of discovery by the foe. For, of that six miles, four were marsh, and swamp, and morass, through which no one could find his way, except the fen-man who had known the place from boyhood.

On they went, following Ailred, their guide, who led them sometimes by firm meadow, sometimes by swampy paths, where the boggy ground trembled under their feet, until they came to a low hill crowned with a clump of dark brushwood. Ailred turned and pointed to the knot of low trees above them, "From those bushes," said he, "we shall see the Danish camp."

They went quickly and quietly up the slope, and, as they did so, a murmur, which they had heard for some time, thickened and grew into a low, tumultuous sound. They pushed through the under-wood, and looked out over the camp below. By this time evening was falling, and broad and red shone the great watch fires along the Danish lines. The noise of laughing and shouting, talking and singing, rolled up the hill to the listening three.

“I have hit upon a lucky time,” said Alfred. “It is clear that they have no thought of a foe or they would not be revelling so gaily. My character will easily bear me out to-night.”

The King and Osric now walked slowly down towards the nearest fire, while Ailred remained on the hill.

Osric's heart beat fast as he drew nearer and nearer to the dreadful Danes. Now, he was close enough to see plainly the men around the first fire. What savage, cruel fellows they looked! He drew a deep breath and glanced up at the King, and with that glance his fear departed. Alfred's calm, strong face wore the composed smile of one who is approaching friends. His cool, resolute confidence gave new courage to Osric, and in another moment they stepped into the circle of the

fire-light. The first to catch sight of them was a huge, red-haired Dane, just lifting a horn of ale to his lips. As soon as Alfred saw that they were observed, he took his harp, and swept his hand over the strings.

“A gleeman,” cried the Dane, as his fellows turned on hearing the ringing notes of the harp, “By the Hammer of Thor, man, thou art welcome. Come, a song, a song.”

Alfred raised his voice and chanted a famous, old Danish song that every man there knew by heart, and, at the sound, other soldiers crowded to the spot, for all loved the music of the gleeman. They kept silence until Alfred ended his lay, and then a great roar of delight burst from the close packed ring.

“Again, again,” they shouted. “Sing again, gleeman.”

Alfred obeyed, and was in the middle of another song, when the crowd parted, and a tall chief, his round helmet crowned with two eagle’s wings wrought in steel, strode among them.

“What means this tumult?” he demanded.

A dozen voices told him, and he bade Alfred continue the song, which had been checked on his appearance, and joined himself in the loud applause which greeted its conclusion.

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note
“Follow me, gleeman,” said he to Alfred, “Thou art no common singer.”

The King and Osric followed him to the very heart of the camp where a great tent was pitched, and this the chief entered.

“The men are peaceable enough,” he said. “It was a gleeman whose song delighted them, and they were shouting their pleasure.”

Alfred stepped forward at once and struck his harp gaily, and sang once more the brave chant which had earned him his welcome in the camp. The chiefs listened to him with equal delight, for music was a passion with them, and the tent rang again with their joyous shouts when he finished. While Alfred sang, Osric, who was standing behind his master looked eagerly on the Danish leaders. They were seated about the place, every one holding in his hand a large horn, hooped with bands of silver, and kept brimming with ale by young men who waited upon them.

In the midst sat Guthrum, a tall, black-bearded man, his eyes shining with pleasure as he waved his hand in time to Alfred’s song. Little did he think that, under that humble guise of a wandering gleeman, his great rival sat there, noting every

word of their unguarded speech, noting every weak point of their carelessly ordered camp.

“If they only knew,” thought Osric, and he trembled, not for himself, but for his royal master. Two hours and more they remained in the tent, and Alfred sang many songs. In the intervals, he would pretend to busy himself with his harp, but his ears were wide open all the time and missed nothing. A loud dispute arose between two of the chiefs, each pressing on Guthrum his own idea as to their future movements. Both had drunk deeply, and they waxed furious, shouting their arguments at one another and their leader in loud and still louder tones.

“Silence,” broke in the deep, strong voice of Guthrum, “Ye are both wrong. We shall break up our camp with the earliest daylight and go whither I will.”

The disputants were quieted by this, and soon one of them fell fast asleep. Gradually, the strong ale which had been flowing freely, began to have its effect upon the rest of the party, and they grew drowsy over their horns.

Osric felt himself lightly touched on the shoulder, and saw the King's finger pointing to the open door of the tent. They went gently out, and

found themselves in the midst of a sleeping camp. The great fires were dying down, and the Danes lay about them in rings, with here and there a careless sentinel, dozing at his post.

They walked slowly through the ranks of the Danish army, stopping now and again, and looking about them, so that any one who saw them thought that the harper and his lad were searching for some warm corner at a camp fire to sleep.

Moving on in this way, they came to the point at which they had entered, and here, for the first time, fortune was against them. A Dane, with his great battle-axe over his shoulder, was marching steadily to and fro, keeping watch and ward. Of all that careless array one had chosen to perform his duty, and he lay in their path.

“Osric,” said the King, softly. “When I give the word, fling the harp down, and run.”

Alfred waited till the sentinel had turned his back on them, and was at the furthest point of his beat, then whispered, “Now,” and they ran for the hill, and the shelter, and Ailred. But, as they flew past the last fire, with its sleeping band, one of the Danes raised his shaggy head and shouted an alarm.

At a flash the sentinel turned, and seeing the

running figures, pursued them instantly. But the fugitives had a good start and were vanishing into the darkness, when the man who had given the alarm, and was the nearest to them, flung a javelin which brought Osric to the ground. The boy was unhurt, for the spear had grazed his side and the point catching in his *jerkin, had borne him to the earth. But before he could rise, the swift-footed Dane, who had thrown the missile, held him by the neck, and up came the sentinel and half-a-dozen others who had been roused by the warning cry. Several of these continued the pursuit after the King, while Osric's captor dragged the boy back to the fire.

"Why," said one, "it is the gleeman's harp-bearer."

"And here is the harp," said another, "flung away on the grass."

"Saxon thieves were they," said the sentinel, and swung up his axe.

Osric saw the bright steel shining over his head and shuddered and closed his eyes, but the man who had caught him, stayed the downfall of the weapon.

* A jerkin was a close fitting jacket.

“Hold your hand, comrade,” said he. “He is my property, not yours. And I have a mind to keep him.”

Dragging Osric a little aside, the Dane tied his hands behind his back with a thong of leather. A second thong was used to bind his ankles tightly together, and then the lad was tossed aside on the grass.

As the Dane returned to the fire, the remainder of the party came back, and Osric strained ear and eye to discover how they had fared. To his great joy he found they had been unsuccessful, and he lay back on the grass, caring nothing for his own bonds. Little by little, the fire and the figures around it became more and more indistinct, and tired out with his day's journeying and adventures, he fell fast asleep.

When he awoke, the morning was breaking, and the camp was a scene of great bustle and confusion. At first, Osric felt utterly bewildered. His wrists and ankles were stiff and sore from the pressure of the thongs, and he could scarcely realize to himself what had happened. But the events of the night before soon came into his mind, and he looked round upon his enemies. No one was taking any notice of him, and the Danes were busy gathering together

their weapons and spoil, and making ready for departure.

Osric began to twist his wrists and work them in the thongs, to try and get a little life back into his numbed hands, but, as he did so, a hope of freedom shot into his mind, for the bands began to loosen and stretch. He wriggled and twisted at them with redoubled vigour, and, with a great wrench, drew one hand free. The thongs slipped away from the other hand at once.

Osric lay quite still, keeping his hands under him to hide the fact that they were unbound, and wondering how he could loose his feet, when an extraordinary tumult arose at the other end of the camp. All the Danes near Osric stood to listen, but only for an instant.

It was the din of battle, and loud and clear came the Ahoi ! of the attacking Saxons, and the fierce war cries of the answering Danes as they sprang to defend their camp.

Everyone grasped battle-axe or spear, and rushed to join the struggle, and, in another moment, Osric was left alone. He sat up and tugged at the bonds fastened round his ankles, but they would not yield. He saw, a short distance away, a dagger dropped by one of the running Danes,

and he crept to it on hands and knees. A single slash freed him, and he jumped up, only to fall down again, for his feet were benumbed.

Five minutes' sharp rubbing remedied this, and then he stood up and looked about him. Not two hundred yards away, a band of Saxons was hurrying down the hill. They had been sent round through the woods to fall on the rear of the Danes, and, with a great shout, they rushed through the camp.

Forty yards from Osric, a beech tree stood on the plain. He ran to it, and climbed nimbly up its smooth, slender trunk. Seating himself astride a branch twenty feet above the ground, he looked out from this point of vantage and safety over the field.

The battle was short and furious. The Danes at first made a desperate resistance. But Alfred had planned his movements too skilfully to leave them a single chance. Half-armed, unarrayed, outwitted at all points, attacked both in front and rear, they broke and fled, streaming over the country in all directions. The victory was complete, and the Saxon standard was soon floating over Guthrum's tent.

As soon as Osric saw that the camp was in the

possession of his friends, he came down from the tree, and ran to the place where the standard had been pitched. Under its folds stood Alfred, his face bright with the joy of the victor who wins in a good cause, and surrounded by a throng of exulting Saxons.

Among the latter was Godrith, and his joy was redoubled to see his son. As they were talking together, the King came towards them, followed by a band of his Thanes, to whom he was giving earnest instructions in order that the utmost might be made of this advantage. His eye fell upon them, and he smiled, and placed his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Osric," said he. "Glad am I to see thee safe and sound. Thou deservest something in token of our wanderings through this camp last night. Wear this in memory of Alfred."

As he spoke, the King took a large gold ornament, in the shape of a medal, which he wore on his cloak, and fastened it on Osric's breast. Osric kissed his royal master's hand, and Alfred passed on, followed by loud praises, in which none joined more sincerely than Godrith and Osric, for they had known and loved him, not only as a King, but also as a man.



[After this great victory of the English, the Danes begged for peace. Alfred and Guthrum made a treaty, called the Treaty of Wedmore, by which they agreed to divide England between themselves, and Guthrum also agreed to become a Christian. The Danes took the northern and eastern parts of England, Alfred the southern and western. If you take a map, and draw a line from London to Chester you will get a good general idea of how they divided the country. The Danish portion was called the Danelaw, because Danish laws and customs were observed there. This agreement enabled Alfred to turn his attention from fighting to a task which was far dearer to him—the improvement of his country and people. He and his wise men carefully drew up good laws, set the law-courts in order, and saw that justice was done to all. Alfred loved learning himself, and was eager that others should learn also. He invited to his court, men famous for their knowledge, and employed them as teachers. He opened schools, restored churches and monasteries, and encouraged every kind of good work. He translated books from Latin into English for his people to read, and wrote songs himself for them. He did not forget the Danes, indeed, he could not, for now and again fresh bands come to trouble him, but he made a skilful arrangement of his army, and built some ships to meet the Danes on the sea, and so kept them at their distance. Finally, he died in 901 A.D., leaving behind him a great and famous name, of which the English are fond and proud to this day. The reigns of his son Edward (901—925, A.D.) and

of his grandson Athelstan (925--940 A.D.) were filled with fighting. They were mighty warrior-kings and steadily won back the Danelaw. There was now, at last, one king over all England, and, until 978 A.D., the country was ruled firmly by kings of Alfred's line. Then came a king called Ethelred the Unready (unready, here, means unwilling to listen to counsel), a weak, self-willed man and quite unfitted for the task to which he was called, that of facing fresh inroads of the Danes.



STATUE TO KING ALFRED AT WANTAGE.

Very sorry, now you
find it on page 134.

ST. BRICE'S DAY.

- I. AN OLD ENGLISH HOME.
 - II. HOW ELGITHA RODE TO UBBESTON.
 - III. HOW ELGITHA FARED AT UBBESTON.
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I.

AN OLD ENGLISH HOME.

A DULL November day was drawing towards twilight, and the great hall of the old Saxon house of Martlesham seemed empty. But it was not altogether so. A little girl sat near the great fire of oak logs which blazed in the middle of the wide room, its smoke curling in clouds up to the blackened beams of the lofty roof, and pouring through a hole in the ridge. She sat with her chin in her hand, staring into the blaze, and was so intent upon her thoughts, that she scarcely noticed two men who came in at the bottom of the hall, and commenced to bundle together the rushes with which the floor was strewn.

“Hundewolf,” said one, “Hast sharpened thy knife?”

“Sharpened!” cried Hundewolf. “Ay. I have indeed, and sword, and spear, too. Twill be a brave day. I have marked spoil in a dozen places.” The little girl raised her head and listened.

“Gislingham, Pettaugh, and Ubbeston, there are three places, Danes all,” said Anwold, the second man.

“Ubbeston, what of Ubbeston, dost think, Anwold?” said Hundewolf, as if perplexed.

“Every one, man,” cried Anwold. “Old and young, rich and poor, hide, and horn, and hoof.”

“Hist, Anwold,” said Hundewolf, catching sight of his young mistress. Anwold glanced round, and fell silent. Not another word was exchanged, as they carried away the rushes and spread fresh, then they brought in trestles and long boards, and put together a table running right across the wide hall.

The notes of a horn, faint, and sweet, and far, now came to her ear, and Elgitha sprang from her seat and ran to the window. A wide, grassy avenue led to the front of the house, and down this came galloping the hunting train, returning from their day's sport. In front rode Baldrick of Martlesham, Elgitha's father, a beautiful falcon

on his wrist, several couples of great, shaggy hounds bounding on either side, and behind, his attendants, bearing a fat buck, some wild fowl, and a blue heron, the spoil of the day.

As Baldrick came near he saw his little daughter's face at the window, and waved a joyous greeting. Elgitha flew down to the door to meet him, and led him to the fire, over which Baldrick stretched his hands. His long cloak he gave to Elgitha, who carried it to the bower room at the further end of the hall.

The removal of his cloak showed that Baldrick was attired in the usual dress of a wealthy man among the Old English. He wore a dark blue woollen tunic of the finest and softest texture, which came to the knee, and was fastened at the throat with a golden brooch. His scarlet stockings were bound crosswise from knee to ankle with strips of leather, and his shoes were pointed and open in front nearly to the toes.

Now that the hunting train had arrived, all was instant bustle and preparation for the evening meal. A cloth was spread over the upper part of the long, clumsy table, but the lower was left bare. Platters of wood and wooden bowls for broth were set along its surface, together with round cakes of

bread, great vessels containing milk and ale, and, at the upper end, a few knives.

Then the cooks began to bring in the steaming joints on huge dishes, beef, and venison, and pork, fish, and fowl, and game, and all the hungry fellows who had followed their master that day by wood, and stream, and pool, eagerly snuffed up the savoury smells and edged little by little towards the board.

Every one had gathered in the hall. The groom came when he had stabled and fed the horses; the falconer came when he had shut up the hawks; the huntsman came from his hounds, and, last of all, and creeping to the bottom place, came the slave, who had spent the day in threshing, or in driving the swine afield, or watching the cattle in the meadow.

At the upper end of the table stood two large chairs for the master and mistress, and these were taken by Baldrick and his daughter, for Elgitha's mother had gone to Fressingham, twenty miles away, to nurse her sick father, and the little girl, to her great pride, had been permitted to take her mother's place.

No sooner had they seated themselves, than their retainers and servants surrounded the board

like magic, dragging up benches and clumsy stools, and some, even blocks of wood, and a tremendous onslaught was made upon the smoking dishes.

When the meal was over, some of the servants began to clear away the table, while those who had finished their duties for the day gathered in lazy content around the great fire.

"Father," said Elgitha, drawing him away to the bower room, "Why is Hundewolf sharpening his knife and sword? And what is he going to do to the Danes with them?"

"Hundewolf!" said her father in surprise, "the foolish, chattering fellow. What has he been telling you?"

Elgitha told what she had heard, and her father's brow cleared.

"Oh, well," said he. "There is some quarrel between the English and the Danes always, and you must not take any notice of what Hundewolf said."

"Do they quarrel about the money we have to pay to them, the Danegeld?" asked Elgitha.

"You are coming close to it, my little girl," said Baldrick. "It is like this. More than two hundred years ago, in the time of our famous King Alfred, of whom we talk so much, a great many Danes

came to England and won a large part of the country. Indeed, our good king was obliged to share his land with them. But those Danes have long since settled down quietly, and become a part of our nation. We, ourselves, have some Danish blood in our veins, for my grandmother Gyda, was a pure Dane. Now, about twenty years ago, great bands of Danes came sailing over the sea again to attack our shores. You have heard many times of the dreadful mischief they have done, but luckily, there has been no fighting about Martlesham here. Eleven years ago we fought a dreadful battle at Maldon, but were beaten, and after that, our king, Ethelred, determined to pay the Danes money to go away."

"The Danegeld," said Elgitha.

"That is it," said her father. "When the matter came before the Witan, we had a stormy meeting. Some of us, and I was one, opposed it bitterly, for we saw that if these Danes who were now troubling us went away with their gold, we should soon have a fresh horde clamouring for more. However, we were over-ruled, and the majority of the Witan, led by Archbishop Sigeric, who first thought of the plan, supported the king in carrying out the idea. Since then, that which we feared has come only too

true. Three years afterwards a terrible host landed under Olaf Trygvasson and Sweyn. They attacked London, but were beaten off, and then they marched through the country, doing unspeakable evil. Olaf was bought off by this foolish Danegeld, and Sweyn soon after returned to Denmark to recover the kingdom from which he had been exiled. Since then, smaller bands have constantly been harassing us, and will, as long as we make it profitable to them."

"It is the new Danes, then, who are our enemies, not the old ones?" said Elgitha. Her father laughed.

"That is exactly right," said he, "the new Danes and not the old ones."

"But my aunt, Gunhilda, at Ubbeston, is a new Dane," went on Elgitha, "For she has often told me stories of the land where she lived when she was a little girl, far across the sea."

"Yes," said her father. "There have been some marriages between the English and the later Danes, as in the case of your mother's brother and your aunt Gunhilda. To-morrow, you shall come with me on your pony, and we will go to Ubbeston and fetch her and the two children to Martlesham."

Elgitha clapped her hands for joy, and, until Urfried, the bower woman, came to attend her to bed, never ceased to talk of the morrow's expedition.

II.

HOW ELGITHA RODE TO UBBESTON.

THE next morning, Elgitha's first thought was of the ride to Ubbeston, but, on running out into the great hall, she saw a man all splashed with mud, sitting by the fire, while old Edgar was giving him food, and talking earnestly with him.

"Who is that, Edgar?" she asked, as the old servant passed her.

"It is a messenger, who has been riding all night to bring news to your father," replied Edgar. "He comes from the *Ealdorman."

At this moment Baldrick entered, fully dressed, and ready for instant departure.

"Oh, father," cried Elgitha, running up to him. "Are you going away at once?"

"In five minutes I must be on my road, Elgitha," said Baldrick, stroking her hair, "I must attend upon the Ealdorman at once. The matter admits of no delay. But I shall be back in two days, and then we will ride to Ubbeston. I

*The name Ealdorman—alderman or elderman—at first was given to the leader of a band or tribe. At the time of this story it meant a man to whom the king had given the rule over a province.

have given orders to Edgar about everything, and you will do as he tells you."

"Is something going to happen, father?" said Elgitha. Baldrick laughed.

"What makes you think that, my little girl?" he asked.

"Because you are speaking so seriously and solemnly."

Her father smiled again.

"You are a little witch," he said. "It is true that I have my reasons for bidding you obey the directions I have left with Edgar, but I cannot explain them now."

A trampling of horses, and a clatter of voices at the door showed that Baldrick's men were ready to attend him, and in a few minutes they rode away, their horses' feet brushing off the hoar frost which lay thick on the grass.

Two days passed, and three, and four, but still Baldrick did not return. Then, on the morning of the fifth day, Elgitha came into the hall to find old Edgar storming furiously at a man who stood before him with down-hanging head.

"Lazy rogue," roared Edgar. "Careless knave. Bitter shall be thy punishment for this. Begone!" and the fellow slunk away.

"Oh, Edgar," cried Elgitha. "Has my father come back? And what has Leofwin been doing?"

"No, my little mistress," said Edgar, "your father has not come back. But here is that knave, Leofwin, saying that he has a letter from my master. And when the careless fellow comes to open his pouch, it is empty, and the letter is gone. I'll warrant me it is lying under the bench of some alehouse on the road?"

"And what will you do, Edgar?" asked Elgitha.

"I do not know what to do," returned the old man. "Had but the letter come to my hands, I would have read it like any monk, ay, like any monk," repeated old Edgar proudly, for to read was no small accomplishment in those days, "And done my master's bidding faithfully. But how am I to know now?"

On the second morning after the arrival of Leofwin, without the letter which his master had entrusted to him, Elgitha woke up to find the house unusually quiet. The window of the room in which she slept looked out on the great courtyard, and this, as a rule, was a busy place before daybreak at this time of the year. But she peeped out at a wide, empty space, strangely silent and desolate. There was no sign of Urfried, and

Elgitha dressed herself quickly, and ran to find out what it all meant. The hall was empty, the kitchens, the outbuildings were empty, the place was deserted. What could it mean? Elgitha paused, and listened. She caught the sound of voices, and ran up a flight of steps leading to a small gallery high above the hall. Here she found two women, Urfried and Berwine, looking intently towards the village which lay half-a-mile below, at the foot of the ridge on which Martlesham was built.

“What is the matter, Urfried?” cried Elgitha.

“Where have all the men gone?”

“They have gone to kill the Danes,” said Urfried.

“To kill the Danes!” repeated Elgitha. “Why?”

“To be rid of them, I suppose,” answered Urfried.

“And a good thing, too. My father and two brothers were killed fighting against them, and the word came lately for every man to take his weapons on the festival of St Brice, and root them out.”

“Ay, all of them,” chimed in Berwine. “Man, woman, and child. They have troubled us long enough. See!” she continued, “some of our men are coming back. What are they carrying?”

The two women ran swiftly down the steps, and Elgitha followed them.

“ Brave pickings ! ” shouted one of the men, as he approached the door where Urfried and Berwine were standing. “ We had the luck to be first in at the house of old Askill, the richest Dane in these parts. Look ! ” and he displayed his spoil to the greedy eyes of the women.

Elgitha slipped back into the hall, and stood for a moment to think. What was happening to her aunt Gunhilda, and her little cousins at Ubbeston ? Her uncle Wulfrie had been dead six months, and who would now protect his widow and children ?

“ That was why father sent the letter,” she thought. “ He knew this was coming, and sent to Edgar to fetch aunt Gunhilda, because he would not be back soon enough. I know the way very well. I will go at once. Perhaps I shall be in time, and if I can only get them to Martlesham, they will be safe and no one will dare to touch them here.”

She heard Edgar’s name mentioned, and listened, and found that the old man was doing his best to bring some of the men back to their duty of guarding the house, but with little success. Elgitha ran lightly and swiftly across the courtyard to the stables. Her black pony, Balder, lifted his head and neighed a greeting, and rubbed his soft, dark

muzzle against the shoulder of his little mistress. In five minutes she had saddled him, and led him to the gate of the courtyard.

From this point, a wide path ran along the back of the house and struck into the avenue at some distance below. Elgitha sprang into the saddle, and away went Balder, whinnying with delight to feel the turf beneath his feet, for he had not been out for several days. In a few minutes Elgitha drew near the village. She had not to go entirely through it, for the road to Ubbeston turned away after the first few houses had been passed.

The first place was the forge of Olaf the Dane. As she approached it, Balder snuffed the air and trembled, then reared furiously so that Elgitha had much ado to keep her seat.

What was that dark stain running from the open door of the forge? She knew it for blood, and understood Balder's wild plunge of disgust and rage.

The pony put down his head and dashed forward, and, as they swept by, Elgitha glanced into the forge. There lay Olaf on his face, dreadfully still, his black, grimy hands outstretched and clutching the floor, just as he had fallen. Elgitha

drew the left hand rein and sent Balder along the road to Ubbeston at the top of his speed. What, if some such dreadful sight were to greet her there !

She was now crossing wild moorland, bare and open far to either side of the way, and she had not gone half a mile when she saw a band of men crossing a ridge away to the right, and marching in the direction of Ubbeston.

They saw her also, and waved their swords, and shouted at her, calling on her to stop, and seeing that she galloped steadily on, ran to cut her off. Balder was too swift for them, and when the leading man saw that the pony would pass the nearest point of the road before he could reach it, he stopped running, and fitted an arrow to his bow.

Taking careful aim, he drew the bowstring to his ear, and shot. But his target was moving too quickly, and Elgitha heard the arrow hiss behind her. . Others shot also but Balder was going so swiftly that in a few minutes they were far out of range. Still the men continued to shout, and Elgitha glanced over her shoulder. They were standing with their backs to her, and waving their hands as if calling on some one beyond the ridge,

and, even as she looked, she saw two horsemen come into sight, and gallop after her.

Elgitha gave a cry of fear, and encouraged Balder with hand and voice to do his best. She was not afraid for herself. She knew very well that no one would dare to touch her, when they found out who she was, but it was for her aunt and the two little cousins whom she loved so much, that she uttered that cry.

She sat tight down to her saddle, her long hair streaming behind her in the wind, and urged Balder on. The gallant, fiery little fellow answered nobly to the call, and his hoofs beat the hard, clean road with sharp, regular strokes as he stretched out to his fullest gallop. Thus, two miles were covered, and Elgitha glancing back, found that one horseman alone was following her.

The other had drawn rein and his exhausted steed had slowed down to a walk. The road now rose, and Balder gained ground, for the weight he carried was a mere nothing compared to that of the pursuing rider. But on the long down slope which followed, the tall, powerful horse, with its sweeping stride, began to cut down the lead steadily.

“Oh, Balder, Balder,” said Elgitha, patting her favourite’s neck, “Don’t let them catch us.”

Balder twitched his ears sharply as if he heard and understood, and held his way with unabated speed. Faster he could not go for he had been doing his utmost since his little mistress first called upon him. His black muzzle was bathed in a snowy foam, shining streaks of which lay across his heaving chest, the sweat was pouring from him in streams, his nostrils opened and closed convulsively as he drew great breaths, yet he continued to bound along like a hare, his big, bright eyes as full of fire as ever, his small, strong shoulders rising and falling regularly under Elgitha.

For another mile they swept along, but the big horse behind was gaining slowly and surely. Now the woods of Ubbeston came in sight, and they flew by a great upright stone which marked the boundaries of the Ubbeston land.

“Two miles by the road from the big stone to the house,” thought Elgitha, her heart sinking. “We can never do it. It’s downhill now, nearly all the way. The big horse will catch us.” Suddenly, she gave a cry of joy. Her little brain was working as nimbly as Balder’s heels, and she saw a chance. Half-a-mile ahead, the road turned to the left and skirted a great bog. As a rule, this bog was impassable for anyone mounted,

but a footpath crossed it, and she resolved to head Balder along the path. Besides, there had been a sharp frost in the night, and that would help her. Certainly, Balder, under her weight, would skim like a bird over places where her pursuer dare not follow.

As she came to the point where the path turned across the bog, she glanced behind. Scarcely fifty yards lay between them, and she could see the man plainly. He was a stranger to her, and so, no one over whom she could have influence. He was crouching down to his horse's mane and flogging madly. The bog was her only chance. To stay on the road meant to be caught within half-a-mile.

Touching the right-hand rein, she turned Balder off the highway, and sent him flying over the crisp turf for the great tuft of rushes which marked the spot where the path entered the marshy flats. The change to the grass was instantly in their favour. Looking back, she saw that the horse was cutting fetlock deep into the soft turf on which Balder left scarcely the imprint of his hoof.

In a minute, she was past the rushes, and Balder was splashing her from head to foot as he dashed

along the swampy path, crashing through the thin ice which the frost of the previous night had left. But still he held his way, galloping steadily forward, and still the pursuer followed.

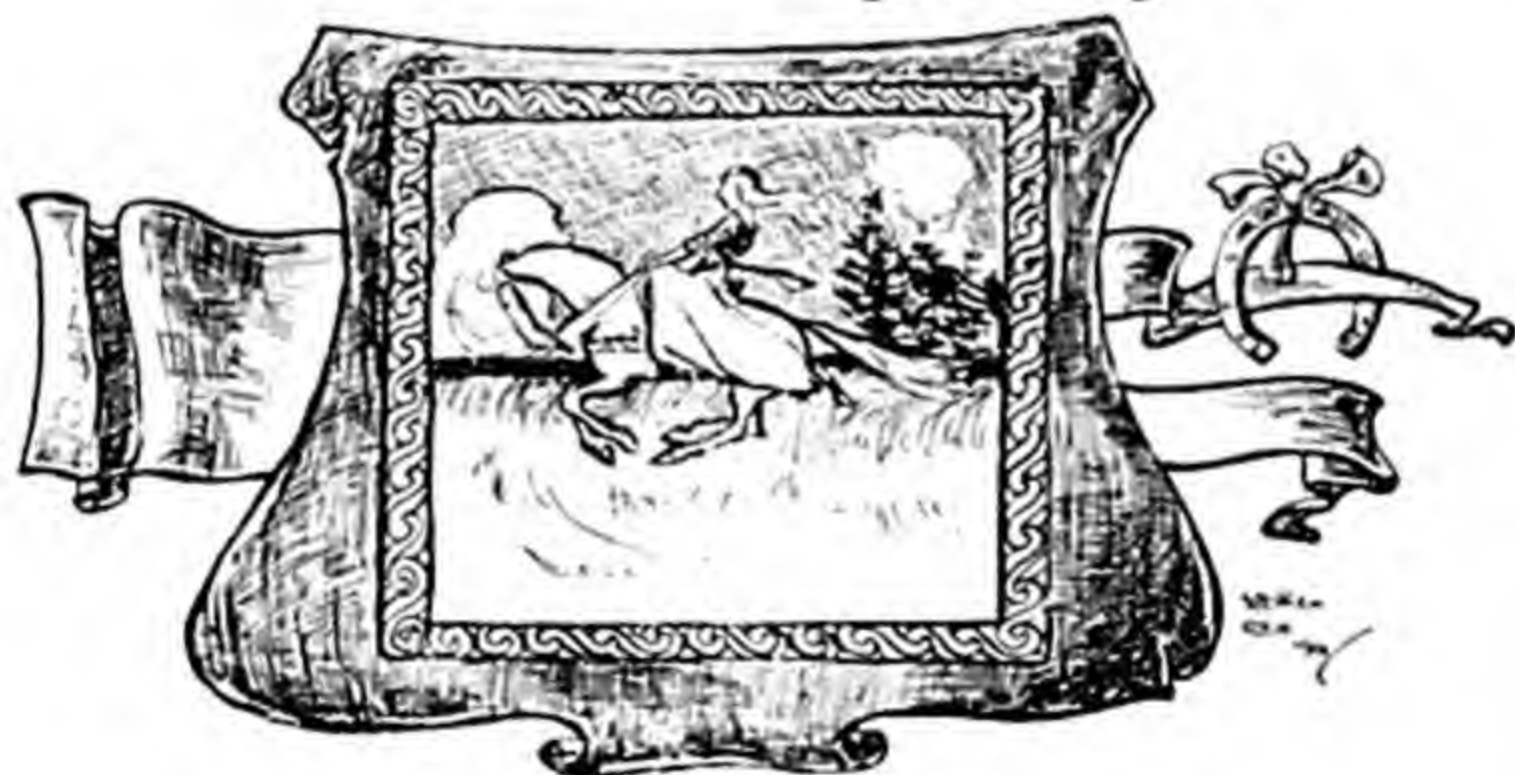
A hundred yards further, the path ran across a dozen feet of soft, black mud. Foot passengers crossed it by leaping from tuft to tuft of the rushes, and Balder, who had been reared among such places, and knew his way about a bog very well, paused for the first time in his furious gallop. With his nose down, and feeling his way with gentle, careful pawings he trod lightly and delicately across, and, just as he sprang away on the further side, up thundered the great horse.

There was no chance of such a heavy creature picking its way over as the light-footed Balder had done, and its rider, with a shout, drove it to a furious leap, hoping to clear the treacherous patch. But such a feat was beyond its powers. Blown by its great exertions, slipping in the slimy sedge as it rose to the leap, the horse made a gallant effort, but fell a yard short, and, crashing with a mighty splash through the stiffened surface, and sinking to its haunches in the foul, black ooze, was hopelessly bogged.

Elgitha gave a cry of delight. Not only was

her present pursuer disposed of but the band following behind would have a good hour's work to get a big horse like that out of such a desperate plight. Ten minutes' wary riding brought her to the further side of the marsh, and then away they flew again over the turf heading for Ubbeston Woods.

*Lone Roll NO 124
of
S. P. College 1950
Srinagar.*



III.

HOW ELGITHA FARED AT UBBESTON.

How eagerly Elgitha bent forward over Balder's neck to peer round the final bend of the path leading to the house. She gave a gasp of relief at what she saw. In front of the house, Wulfketyl, a tall grey-headed old Dane, was standing placidly in the pale, November sunshine, fastening a fresh string to a bow which was tucked under his arm. As Elgitha rode up, he gazed in surprise to see her alone.

"To the house, Wulfketyl," cried Elgitha. "There is great danger abroad."

The Dane ran before her, and flung the heavy door wide open. Without checking her speed Elgitha galloped straight into the hall, and Wulfketyl swung the door to and shot the heavy bolts home.

"Oh, Aunt," cried the little girl as she sprang from Balder, and rushed to meet the lady coming up the hall, "The most dreadful things are happening. All the Danes are being killed. You must come to Martlesham at once, all of you. I

saw Olaf, the smith, lying dead in his forge," and then she told them of the men marching for Ubbeston.

"I knew it," roared old Wulfketyl, clapping his great hands together. "Did I not say something was being planned against us?"

"And you have come all alone to warn us?" said Gunhilda, clasping her niece tightly for a moment, then hurrying away to prepare for instant flight.

"Elgitha," cried two merry little voices, and her cousins, Ranald and Elfrida, ran to her and clung to her hands. Ranald was a handsome little fellow of five, Elfrida just three, and Elgitha trembled as she thought of the furious band marching for the house, and of Berwine's words, "Man, woman, and child," *fill in the blank*

By this time, Gunhilda's household had assembled in the hall. They were all Danes, Wulfketyl, and Azer, and Swend, the men, three of her father's house carles who had remained with her, Estrid and Thyra, the women.

"My little mistress," said Wulfketyl to Elgitha, "Is the noble Baldrick himself at home?"

"No," said Elgitha, "or my aunt would not have been left here so long. But Edgar will see

that no one does any harm to my aunt or her people."

"Ay, Edgar," said he, "I had forgotten Edgar. This band of which you speak cannot be here for a while yet, and by that time we will be far in the forest. Let us but once reach the woods and I will undertake to gain Martlesham by such paths that a wolf could hardly follow us."

He had just finished speaking, when a murmur arose without. It speedily grew, and swelled, and Azer, who was watching at one of the windows, uttered a loud cry.

"They are coming, they are here," he said.

"Impossible in so short a time," cried Elgitha.

"It is another band," replied Azer. "They are coming from Pettaugh."

"How ~~many~~?" asked Wulfketyl.

"A score at least," replied Azer.

The old Dane groaned, and the big, hairy fist which he had clenched, dropped helplessly at his side.

At this instant, Gunhilda hurried down the hall.

There was no need to tell her that their foes had cut them off. Already a rain of deafening blows was being showered upon the stout door. She caught her children to her arms, and stood,

Worth on 1851
Mush
chaps
trembling and pale to her lips. Wulfketyl stepped to a small, grated window beside the door, and tried fair speech with them. *How can I say so*

“What, my masters!” he cried. “Why this violence? We have done you no harm.”

“No harm,” roared a dozen voices at him. “No harm, you Danish thief. The Raven has picked the bones of England long enough. It is our turn now, and we have sworn by holy St. Brice to make a clean sweep of you from the land.”

“Will you let the women and children go free if myself and my comrades deliver ourselves up unarmed to you?” pleaded Wulfketyl.

“No truce, no bargain with the Danes to-day,” shouted the Saxon leader. “Death to the Danes.”

His cry was re-echoed by his followers, and again axes and hammers thundered on the door.

“Give me my bow, Azer,” cried Wulfketyl, his blood rising. “The Saxons shall see to-day ~~how~~ a Dane can fight for his own.”

“Fire,” shouted some of the band without. “Bring fire and smoke them out. We shall spend all day at this door.”

“No fire,” roared the Saxon leader, “the man who brings a torch near shall feel the weight of my axe. What! Give to the fire the spoil now

almost in our grasp. At the door again, I say. It must yield soon."

He spoke but too truly. The upper part was already giving under the tremendous blows laid upon it, and those within could see chinks of light through the thick iron-banded oaken planks.

"No, Wulfketyl," said Elgitha, laying her hand upon his arm, as he drew an arrow from his quiver, "No, you will anger them worse. Open the door and I will speak to them. They will not touch me, I am sure, and, if we wait until the door is beaten down, they will rush madly in and listen to no one."

Wulfketyl bent his grizzled brows upon her and reflected a moment.

"There is a chance in it," he said slowly, "Would you dare?"

"Slip the bolts back and fling the door open," said Elgitha. "They are quiet now."

Azer looked out. "They are coming with a long log," said he. "Seven or eight have hold of it. They will use it as a battering-ram."

"A single stroke of it would let them in now, at any rate," said Wulfketyl, and he gently drew the bolts. The door was flung suddenly back and Elgitha sprang to the entrance. For an

instant the Saxons stood mute in their surprise. Instead of the desperate rush of the Danes, they were confronted by a little girl, with big, shining, steady eyes, who looked over them with an air of command.

“You must go away from here at once,” said Elgitha.

None of them knew her, and a great, mocking shout burst from the band. Loudest of all laughed the leader, a big, fierce-looking fellow, with a blood-stained pole-axe over his shoulder. But Elgitha was not cowed. The spirit of her famous ancestor, Baldrick the Berserker, awoke in her bosom, and she faced them undauntedly. One of them fitted an arrow to his bow.

“How dare you point that arrow at me?” she cried, “I am not a Dane. My father is Baldrick of Martlesham.”

In her proud confidence in her father's name, Elgitha had seized upon a powerful weapon. If her words had been a spell to turn the assailants into figures of stone, they could not have had a more wonderful effect. The Saxons stood silent and motionless.

“As for you,” said Elgitha, shooting her forefinger at the leader, “I know you very well. You

are Edred, the servant of Thurkill, the man who sells horses, and it is about a year now since you brought Balder to Martlesham."

As she spoke, the man recognized her. His fierce look melted into one of terror, his pole-axe trembled in his hands, and he slid to his knees.

"Mercy," he said, and stretched out his hands. A shiver of hesitation passed over the rest of the band, and then they followed his example. For the little maid, standing resolutely before them with pointing forefinger, represented power, great unquestioned power. If she were the daughter of the powerful Thane of Martlesham—and the behaviour of their leader left no doubt upon the point—they knew well, that, if harm came to his daughter the Thane could and would hang up every man of them, for they were of the lower class, and no one would say him nay. Lucky for them, indeed, if he let them off with a death so easy.

So they knelt for pardon. It was a striking change of scene, and those who stood behind Elgitha felt their hearts fill with gratitude and admiration for the dauntless courage which had saved them. A heavy trampling sounded through the wood near at hand, and loud voices, and confused cries, and, from a narrow path, out burst the band from whom

Elgitha had escaped, their numbers largely increased by others who had joined them on the road. The strange sight before the house checked them at once : the hated Danes coolly looking down on a kneeling band of their comrades, and between the two parties, a little girl.

Elgitha scanned the new comers, and lifted her head eagerly."

"Hundewolf," she said, "Leofric, Anwold, Leofwin, Hundebert," picking them out one after the other with her finger. "Come to me at once."

The tall, stalwart fellows came forward, and stood submissively before their little mistress.

"How fortunate that you have come," she cried. "Now you can march with us and keep Aunt Gunhilda and her people safe as we go to Martlesham. Anwold, send all these others away."

Anwold, with a grim smile on his face, bade everyone, not of the Martlesham household, to be gone about his business. No second command was needed. In a moment, the open space before the house was empty, save for the men of Martlesham.

"Lucky for us," growled Anwold to Hundewolf, as Elgitha disappeared into the house, "that our little mistress seems to have no idea of our errand here."



ELGITHA AND THE SAXONS.

“A silent tongue about that,” returned his companion, “or some of us will ride *Odin’s horse. Baldrick, our master, is a very lion in his wrath, and our little mistress is to him as the apple of his eye.”

Azer and Swend brought horses to the front of the house for the women to ride, and next Balder’s hoofs rattled on the stones of the hall, as Elgitha cantered through the doorway. Gunhilda, her children, and attendants followed, got to horse at once, and the whole party moved away for Martlesham.

They had passed the Ubbeston boundary-stone, when a body of horsemen came in sight, galloping furiously towards them. The men grasped their weapons, but a single glance at a rider far in front of the main body, satisfied Elgitha. She gave a cry of joy, and dashed forward to meet him.

“It is Baldrick himself,” whispered the men.

“What is this dreadful thing, Baldrick?” said Gunhilda, as they came up to the spot where Elgitha and her father were awaiting them.

“It is a black business, Gunhilda,” answered the Thane of Martlesham, “and a useless one. To slaughter thousands of peaceful folk, as if that

* This was an expression for being hanged.

would mend affairs, while for every one put to death in England, there are ten savage kinsmen beyond the sea ready to fall upon us. I have ridden thirty miles to-day, anxious to get home, and on the way I have seen more blood spilt than in ten pitched battles."

Gunhilda shuddered.

"We owe our lives entirely to Elgitha," she said, and told what had happened at Ubbeston.

Her father put out his hand and patted Elgitha's shoulder as she rode at his side.

"When I reached home and found that Edgar had not received my message, which chiefly concerned your safety," said he, "I felt sure she had gone to you, and I rode on at once." The house of Martlesham, perched on its commanding ridge, came in sight, and they saw great clouds of smoke rolling up from the village.

"They have fired the houses of the Danes," said Baldrick. "It is everywhere the same. The taste of blood seems to have driven our people mad."

"And have none escaped, Baldrick?" said Gunhilda.

"Very, very few in this part of the country, I fear," replied he gravely. "But you are safe at

any rate, and, I think," he continued, smiling on Elgitha, "there are not many little girls to-day who will be able to say, in after years, that alone they preserved a whole Danish household from destruction on St. Brice's Day."

[The stupid and useless butchery of St. Brice's Day brought about the downfall of the old English line of kings. Sweyn, King of Denmark, whose own sister and brother-in-law had been slain, led over a great army of Danes, thirsting for revenge. For ten years the invaders ravaged the country almost as they pleased. The English, disunited and continually beaten, were thoroughly cowed, and, bit by bit, the Danes conquered the whole country. The Danelaw submitted first, and when in 1013 A.D. Wessex finally gave way, Ethelred fled to Normandy, of which country his wife was a native. Sweyn died in 1014 A.D., and Ethelred returned to contest the crown with Sweyn's son, Canute, but died himself in 1016 A.D. His son, Edmund, who was such a contrast to Ethelred that he was called "Ironsides" struggled fiercely with Canute, and they fought battle after battle, till at Ashington, in Essex, Edmund was defeated. But Canute had no mind for further fighting, and divided the country between himself and Edmund. In a short time Edmund died, and Canute became sole ruler. He proved a great and wise king and was followed by his two sons, Harold and Hardicanute. Hardicanute died suddenly in 1042 A.D., and the Old English line was restored by placing on the throne Edward, the son of Ethelred the

Unready. Edward, who was called for his piety, the Confessor, had been brought up in Normandy, his mother's home, and was thus filled with Norman ideas. When he came back to rule England he brought a number of Norman friends and followers, the Norman language was spoken freely at the English Court, and Normans were placed in positions of authority. This did not please the English nobles, and the chief of them, Godwin, Earl of Wessex, was banished owing to his opposition to the new comers. At this time, William, Duke of Normandy, paid a visit to England to see Edward the Confessor, who was his cousin, and William afterwards declared that Edward had promised him the crown of England. Such a gift, however, did not lie in Edward's power, for it was the business of the Witan to choose the next king, and so, when Edward the Confessor died in 1066 A.D., leaving no children, the Witan elected Harold, the son of Godwin, to the vacant throne. As soon as William of Normandy heard of this he began to collect a great army to invade England. Harold made ready to resist him, but was disturbed in the midst of his preparations by the news that his brother Tostig, who had been banished from England for his misconduct, had landed in the north of England, accompanied by Harold Hardrada, King of Norway, and a great army, and was ravaging the country. Harold of England marched north at once, and overthrew Hardrada and Tostig at a great battle at Stamford Bridge. But while the English were feasting after the victory, a messenger arrived with the news that William had landed at Pevensey. Harold hurried south at once,

gathering men as he marched, and met William on October 13th, 1066 A.D., at Senlac, near Hastings. Here a terrible battle was fought for the crown of England. The English did their utmost, and the struggle was long and desperate. But the death of Harold, who fell, surrounded by the bravest of his followers, decided the day in favour of the Normans. They had now gained possession of the south-east of England, and they treated the English with great cruelty, robbing and killing right and left, and dividing the possessions of the English nobles and landowners among themselves.]

*How Roll no!
7 of s.p. courage*



HAROLD.

AFTER HASTINGS.

I. THE CHILDREN OF KEMSING.

II. NORMANS AND SAXONS.

III. ALGAR AND HIS ENEMY.

I.

THE CHILDREN OF KEMSING.

“CAN you see any one, Algar? Is there no sign yet of father coming back?”

Edith looked up into the branches of the lofty tree, to the top of which her brother had climbed, and waited eagerly for his answer.

“No,” said Algar slowly. “the road is empty just as before.”

Edith turned and fixed her eyes upon the white notch in the distance, where the road climbed a little hill and disappeared. Several days before, she had stood upon the same spot to watch her father ride out of sight, followed by the forty stout fellows, who followed Haco of Kemsing to war.

She remembered well how that her father had

been just on the point of riding to the mere, hawk on wrist, when a man, all panting for breath, had raced up to the house, holding on high the splintered war-arrow,* and shouting the name of the meeting place; how the hawk had gone back to its perch, and sword, and shield, and spear were brought forth; and how Wulfric, their swiftest runner, had carried on the message of strife, while every fighting man of Kemsing had mustered to march after the Thane, her father.

“I see something,” shouted Algar, from the top of the tree. “Yes, yes, I see it again. It is a sharp flash of light, like the sun falling upon helmets or spears. The battle is over. They are coming back.” The boy began to descend the tree, slipping rapidly from branch to branch, while the girl below watched him, fearful lest he should fall. She turned her head and saw an old man approaching the place.

“They are coming back, Vebba,” she called out. “Algar has seen them in the distance.”

When the Saxon ruler wished to gather together the Fyrd—the national army—he sent messengers bearing splintered arrows as a sign of war. Thereupon, all the fighting men marched to the given place, each one fully armed, and ready to go against the foe.

“Say you so,” replied old Vebba. “We shall soon hear then what fortune they have had with the fierce Normans.”

“What fortune !” cried Algar, dropping from the last branch to the ground, “Why victory, of course. Did not father tell us before he started that our King Harold had won a famous fight in the North against the greatest warrior of the day, Hardrada, the Norwegian ? And if he won there, he will win against the Normans.”

“There they come,” cried Edith, “but how few ! And where is father ?”

Old Vebba said nothing, but gazed with uneasy eye upon the returning band. The children bounded down towards them, and he followed. The two parties soon drew near to each other, and the downcast faces and dejected steps of the returning warriors told their tale without need for speech. All were foul with stains of blood and battle, and some were pale from wounds, and limped as they walked.

“Wolnoth,” shouted the boy and girl to the leader. “Wolnoth, where is father ?”

Wolnoth tried to smile, but his lips quivered. “He has remained behind,” said he. “He is with the King.”

“But how went the battle?” cried Algar.
“Have you not won!”

“No, my little master,” replied Wolnoth. “We have seen a dreadful day, and have left the Normans victorious.”

“And father is still with the King?” cried Edith.

“Yes,” replied Wolnoth. “Will you not,” he continued to Algar, “run forward and bid them prepare a horse litter? We have left two men on the heath, too feeble to stir another step and faint from loss of blood.”

Algar went at once and Edith ran with him. Vebba and Wolnoth looked upon each other sadly and solemnly.

“It is the worst, it is the worst,” said the old man, “and you dared not tell the children. My master is dead.”

Wolnoth nodded assent. “Never in my life have I seen or heard of such a terrible day, Vebba. Our noble Haco is dead. He is, indeed, with the King, for he fell in the ring which closed round Harold’s dead body.”

“And is the English power utterly broken?” asked Vebba.

“For this battle, at any rate,” replied Wolnoth.
“The Normans pursued with their horse and gave

no quarter. Small, broken bands of us who knew the country managed to slip away, but the slaughter has been fearful."

"And who is to tell those children?" said old Vebba.

"I could not," replied Wolnoth.

"It must be your wife," said Vebba. "Githa has been their nurse always, and their second mother since their own died."

The battle of Hastings was nearly three months old when, one cold January day, Wolnoth ran swiftly down the long avenue which led to the great house of Kemsing. He burst into the hall and shouted for Vebba.

"What now, Wolnoth?" cried the old man, hurrying from an inner room, and followed by Algar and Edith.

"There is a band of Normans within a mile of the house," said Wolnoth. "I was in the wood binding faggots, and I heard the clattering of horses' feet. I looked out and saw them, and then ran here by the nearest way."

"Normans, Wolnoth," cried Algar. "Shall we not close the doors, and call our men together, and hold Kemsing against them? It is what father would have done at once."

“Aye, my little master,” said Wolnoth, sorrowfully, “but the noble Haco could have mustered half-a-hundred to the work, and most of those now lie on the fatal field of Senlac. Perhaps we could now count a dozen, but those coming on, what with knights, and men-at-arms, and archers, are fully three score.”

Old Vebba gave a cry of despair. “To think,” he groaned, “that I should live to see the day when Kemsing should pass into the hands of a foreigner and outlander. Ye must fly, ye must fly at once, my dearest charges,” he continued to Algar and Edith. “If the fierce and cruel Norman should find you here, your lives would be in danger.”

“Why should he harm us, Wolnoth?” cried Edith. “And why are they coming to Kemsing?”

“The Normans, my little mistress,” replied Wolnoth, “are now masters of all this part of England, and they are taking lands, and houses, and everything to themselves. I fear some Norman lord is leading this band to seize Kemsing, and Vebba is right. You will be in great danger if you remain here, and especially Algar, to whom the rights of our master have descended.”

“Wolnoth,” said Vebba, “take the children to your own home by the path through the woods

behind the courtyard. See, the Normans come. I will remain to meet them."

A knight, clad in full armour, rode into sight, and after him a column of soldiers winding round the distant bend in the path.

"Come," said Wolnoth, "We are delaying too long," and he led Algar and Edith away. Vebba advanced to the great door, flung it back, and stood full in the entrance. From the gate of the court yard, from the windows of the kitchens, from the doors of the stables, pale, frightened faces of women and grooms looked out on the advancing Normans.

The latter moved on in a compact body, and halted at some distance from the wide front of the house. There were a score of lances, and forty archers, the riders in full mail, the archers clad more lightly in leathern breast plates and steel caps. As the Normans came to a stand, a horseman trotted forward from their ranks, his spear held almost upright, and resting on his thigh.

"Give place," he cried to Vebba, "and yield this house with all that belongs thereto to my lord, the noble sire, Roger De Terni, who hath received it in grant from William, Duke of Normandy, and King of England."

“I have known the day, Norman,” replied old Vebba, “when such words would have been answered in Kemsing with broad sword and battle-axe, but the stout hearts that should hold our house against you ceased to beat in the last stand of the Kentish men around the English standard.”

The Norman fixed a keen eye upon the old man and heard him to an end, then waved his lance. At the signal, half-a-dozen archers, arrow on string, marched from the main body and spread themselves in different directions, to search for a hidden foe. Two of them came towards the great door, and led by the horseman, who sprang down from the saddle and took his sword, marched in past the old man. Vebba watched these needless precautions with a melancholy smile. It was not long before the Normans found they had nothing to fear and the rest of the troop came on, led by De Terni himself, a tall, powerful warrior. The latter dismounted, strode into the hall, and looked about keenly on his new possession. The sight of this tore Vebba’s heart, and turning, he hurried away from the place, and sought the cottage of Wolnoth, in which the children of Kemsing had taken refuge.

II.

NORMANS AND SAXONS.

ALGAR and Edith were busy in the woods of Kemsing. They were gathering fallen sticks, and tying them in a bundle. It would have been very difficult to recognize them for the children who had awaited the return of the war-band from Hastings. Instead of the rich dress of the son and daughter of a powerful Thane, they wore the poor, coarse garb of the children of a Saxon peasant. Not only their father, but almost every one of his kinsmen, had fallen on that terrible October day, and there was no one to protect them save faithful servants.

They lived in the cottage of Wolnoth as his own children, and though the whole country side knew very well who they were, yet were they safe, for no one would betray them to the Normans.

Now, they wandered over their own broad lands, picking up sticks for firing, like other peasant children. When the bundle was big enough, Algar swung it to his shoulders, and they started to return to the cottage.

Wolnoth's house was at one end of the straggling

village of Kemsing, and as the boy and girl went along the wide street, many a house-wife looked up from her task, and sighed to think of the dreadful changes which had fallen upon the country since the Norman conqueror came, and of which, those two little figures were so significant.

Heaviest of all sighed old Vebba, who had also taken refuge with Wolnoth, and who, too feeble to be out with the rest of the men in the fields, was looking idly from the cottage door.

“Truly, the world is turned upside down at a stroke, dame,” said he to Githa, who was busy round the fire, “To see my master’s children coming hither with a few sticks from woods where every stick, and branch, and twig is their own.”

“’Tis sad, indeed, Vebba,” said she, “But if the children did not do as other children, it might be thought they are not what they appear. There is one,” she continued, in a low tone, “whose eye is ever on the ground, yet sees all things.”

She nodded her head in the direction she meant, and Vebba turned to look. A Norman priest, Roger de Terni’s chaplain, was walking down the street, a small, thin man, clad in a long, dark robe of serge, the ample cowl pulled over his face.

“Ay, ay,” returned Vebba, in the same tone,

“Those are the fellows to find out a secret and go with it to their lord. I’ll warrant he is going to meet the Norman usurper himself. The word went about that De Terni is on the road back from Normandy, bringing his family this time, to settle in our pleasant Kemsing.”

“They tell me that folks are worse off than we in Broadham,” said Githa.

“So have I heard,” rejoined Vebba. “It has fallen to the hands of one Richard de Molun who encourages his men in every form of wickedness.”

An hour later, and just as Githa had set out their midday meal, a great uproar arose at the further end of the village. Algar ran quickly to the door.

“They are soldiers,” he said, “and, I think, Normans.” Vebba followed slowly.

“Normans they are,” said the old man. “Look how their shaven heads shine white.* Indoors, I say.”

Algar closed the door, and placed across the heavy wooden bar which fastened it. The shutter of the window was pushed to, and through a chink they watched the new comers. The latter were

* It was the custom of the Norman soldiers to shave their heads from the crown to the nape of the neck.

about a score in number, some on horseback, some on foot, and everyone shouting a song which expressed their contempt for the Saxon.

They marched thus to the middle of the village and came to a halt before the inn, where they finished their ribald ditty, and roared aloud for the inn-keeper. Out came Sexwulf, hoping he might please them by speaking them fair, and asked what were their commands.

"Bring out the best thou hast, dog of a Saxon," cried the leader, "ale, wine, mead, and quickly too."

These were not customers with whom to parley, and Sexwulf obeyed instantly. In front of his house was a rude table and bench, and round this gathered the Norman soldiery, drinking deeply, and keeping Sexwulf busy with carrying out fresh supplies.

"Ha!" cried one, "These be an unmannerly race, these Saxons. Have ye noticed, comrades, that no one has come out to greet us? They are lying in their houses like rabbits in their burrows."

"True," said another, "one would think it were a village of the dead. Have we brought the plague with us that we should be so shunned?"

"Let us fetch a few of them out," shouted a

third "and teach them to pay due reverence to their Norman masters."

"Agreed! Agreed!" was the general cry, and they were rushing forward, when Sexwulf raised his voice and called on them to stop.

"My score," cried the innkeeper, "who is to settle my score?"

A loud laugh burst from the Normans, and their leader answered him.

"Thy score, Saxon," said he, "it had been better for thee to let such a matter lie. But, since thou pressest us, Raoul, pay him his score."

Sexwulf turned his head to see Raoul, the archer, with a cruel grin on his face, bending his bow. Before the innkeeper could make a single motion to fly, the bowstring twanged and he fell, pierced by the deadly shaft. His dying cry was drowned in the thundering of axes and lance-butts on the nearest doors, and the shouts of the Normans, "A Molun, A Molun. Plunder, Plunder."

The people of the village, in dreadful fear, rushed from their cottages, for to stay in them meant to be caught without chance of escape. They were mostly women and children, as the men were away at their work, and their shrieks and outcries filled the place with a dismal noise.

“God's Acre, God's Acre,” screamed a woman, running swiftly, with a child in her arms. The word flew from mouth to mouth, and the terrified throng hastened towards the church. Surely, under that sacred roof they would be safe, surely, there, no Norman would dare to molest them.

In at the churchyard gate they rushed, and over the simple mounds where slept the Saxon dead, and poured into the building.

No sooner had the panting crowd thrust themselves inside, than Vebba and Algar, who had stationed themselves near the door, clapped it to, and turned the great key in the clumsy lock. At the lower end of the church stood two great iron-banded coffers, and these were dragged forward and piled against the door to secure it more firmly.

Then a great suspense fell upon them. They could do nothing but wait, and mothers quieted their children, and the tiny windows were crowded with eager, watching faces.

For some time there was no sign of the Normans themselves, for they were searching for plunder in the deserted houses, but soon the unhappy people had ample tokens of their destroying presence. A smell of fire and burning wood came on the wind, then great clouds of rolling smoke. In very

wantonness, the Normans were firing the village with its wooden homesteads.

“They are coming,” said Algar, who was watching, and Edith crept closer to her brother’s side. “They stop outside the churchyard.” The people within the church gave a cry of relief.

“But no,” he continued, sadly, “they come on. They trample over the churchyard as if it were a high road. They are here.”

A great clattering on the door rang through the building, mingled with outcries from the Norman assailants. Many of those within added their weight and strength to the task of holding the door in position, but their efforts availed little against the powerful soldiery without. Still they continued to struggle, for the terrible threats of the besiegers warned them of the fearful fate which hung over their heads.

Suddenly, with a dreadful crash, the upper portion of the door splintered and fell inwards. A Norman bounded through the space left clear and then another. Those nearest the door gave way before them, and they swung the coffer aside, and flung the shattered door back.

A piteous cry for mercy broke from the wretched people in the church, but the answering yell of the

enraged Normans bade them seek pity sooner from the wolves of the forest.

Algar was tugging with all his might at one of the bars of the window which felt a little loose, when he saw a dark figure run swiftly across the open space, and hurl itself at the door, entering with the foremost of the intruders. It was the Norman priest. He flung himself between the infuriated soldiery and their trembling prey, and uttered a terrible cry.

"Back," he screamed. "Out, I say. The curse of the Church on him who disobeys me."

He drew a crucifix from his bosom, and held it towards the Normans. His cowl was flung back and his dark, piercing eye shone full upon them. On their side, the soldiers faltered and stood irresolute. They looked like a group of wild beasts, who, when just about to seize their prey, see a dreadful danger before them, and yet are unwilling to give up the chase.

No other power in the world could have done so much to make them pause. Heated with wine, and furious for blood, no authority of officer or leader could have held them for a moment. And now only one slight man stood in their way. Any one of them could have thrust him aside with a turn of the hand, but no one dared lift that hand.

For it would have been lifted against that power which compelled awe and reverence from all alike—from prince as from peasant—the Church.

Slowly and sullenly, the Norman soldiers gave way before the priest, and retreated to the churchyard. He followed them to the door, and then steadily across to the road, driving the muttering scowling band before him.

The men-at-arms swung themselves up to the saddle, the archers formed behind, and they marched off along the road by which they had come and which led to the house of Broadham, where their master, Richard de Molun, had settled himself in the room of a Kentish Thane.

The monk walked rapidly away, and the poor people whom he had saved from the brutal violence of his fellow-countrymen sent after him a loud shout of praise and thanksgiving before they ran to do what they could to save the burning houses.

Four of these had been fired, the inn and the houses nearest to it, and everyone was hard at work when a fresh tramping of hoofs resounded at the lower end of the village. All eyes were turned that way, fearing the return of their foes, but it was their new master, Roger de Terni,

returning with his family from Normandy. Algar and Edith stood together to look upon the passers-by.

First came three riders, Roger de Terni himself, with his wife on the one hand, and his son, a boy about Algar's age, on the other. Then followed several female attendants, and finally, a troop of lances, displaying the banner of the Norman lord.

They rode past, turning an eye of coldest indifference on the burning houses and the anxious efforts of the Saxon peasantry, and disappeared down the long grassy avenue which ran from the high road to the manor house of Kemsing.

Janke will write
by book.

III.

ALGAR AND HIS ENEMY.

“DOESN'T it seem a long, long time since these cruel Normans came, Algar?” said Edith to her brother, one morning.

“It does,” replied Algar. “It seems to me as long since Wolnoth came back that day, as all my life before.”

“I wonder if uncle Anlaf was in that dreadful battle?” went on the little girl.

“I don't know,” returned Algar, doubtfully, “He lives on the other side of Winchester, and that's a good way from here. It was fought so quickly that I don't think the war arrow would have reached them. At any rate, Wolnoth says that he saw nothing of him there.”

“I wonder if he will come to find out what the Normans are doing here?” said Edith.

“Perhaps he is no better off himself,” said Algar.

Edith sighed, and helped her brother to draw the cord tightly round the sticks they had gathered.

“Listen,” said Algar, sharply. “What is that?”

The notes of a horn, and the baying of hounds came to their ears from the far distance.

“They are hunting,” said Algar. The children listened intently, and the sounds drew nearer. “They are coming this way,” said the boy. He looked quickly round for a place of safety for his sister, since a fierce boar might be galloping ahead of those dogs, and even if it were a timid deer, there was danger from the careless hunting train, who would turn aside for no one.

They were standing beneath the branches of a wide-spreading oak, whose knotty roots ran along the ground like ribs. The lowest branches were not eight feet from the ground.

“There they are,” said Edith, and Algar saw, at the top of a long avenue leading to the spot where they were, a bunch of running creatures, followed by a single rider.

“Into the tree, Edith,” cried Algar, and he helped his sister to climb the rugged trunk. Up she went like a squirrel, Algar followed at once, and they perched themselves on a broad limb and looked on the chase.

“It is a boar,” said Algar, “And what a big one !”

The savage creature, its great tusks hidden in the foam which it had churned up around its jaws, came straight towards the oak in which Algar and his sister were hidden, three great boar hounds

hanging on its flanks, and snapping furiously at its bristly hide. The rider was the Norman boy, the son of Roger de Terni. No one else was in sight. Either he had outstripped the other hunters, or, more likely, they, with the rest of the dogs, had been drawn off on some fresh scent. The boar turned at bay beneath the very tree in which the children were. It gave a swift bound and a sudden, swinging stroke with its huge, white tusk, and one of the dogs rolled over howling, with a dreadful gash in its side.

The boy rode up and drew rein just beyond the baying dogs, waving his boar spear, and encouraging them to the attack. The wild creature put down its head, and charged fiercely. The powerful hounds were flung aside like so many puppies, and the boar rushed upon its human foe, as if perceiving there the deadlier enemy.

With a sharp jerk of the rein the boy turned his pony aside, but not quickly enough, for the boar caught the animal's hind legs in its tremendous rush, and hurled it over on its side. The Norman boy was pitched out of the saddle, and, striking his head against a projecting root, lay stunned beneath the tree.

“Do not move, Edith, on any account,” cried

Algar, as he swung himself off the branch and dropped to the ground. He seized the boar spear which had fallen from the hand of the prostrate boy, and placed himself between De Terni and the furious animal which was now engaged in another battle with the dogs.

Algar saw the small, savage eyes of the boar fixed upon him as the great creature lowered its head for another charge, but he did not shrink. Dropping on one knee, he placed the butt of the boar spear against one of the iron ribs of oak which furrowed the ground about his feet, and directed its shining head against the animal now running directly upon him.

Algar knew the fatal place very well, just where the huge neck met the bristly shoulder, and he coolly laid the keen point in the very spot. The boar's furious rush proved its own destruction. The tough, ash shaft, backed by the immovable root, held without a crack, and the steel head was buried deep in the body of the great tusker, who rolled over dead. As it did so, the elder De Terni rode up, and Edith dropped from the tree, and ran to the fallen boy.

"Pardex!" roared the Norman, "My gallant lad. A nobler feat I never saw. And thou, a

Saxon peasant !” He sprang from his horse, and lifted his son, who now opened his eyes, and gave signs of returning consciousness.

Edith had run to a spring close by, and was returning with water in the Norman boy’s own cap which had flown a dozen yards away when he fell. De Terni bathed his son’s face, and wiped away the blood which was running from a slight wound on his forehead.

While he was doing this, several more of the hunting train arrived, and gathered around the fallen boar. As for Algar, he was being overwhelmed with caresses by two great boar-hounds, which had belonged to Haco.

They were not long in discovering their little master under his changed guise, and sprang about him, licking his hands and face, and whining with delight, to the great astonishment of the Norman retainers who were looking on. One dog in particular, an old favourite, was so demonstrative in his joy that he leapt again and again on Algar, putting his paws on the boy’s shoulders.

“Down, Ringer !” cried Algar, the familiar command slipping past his lips without a thought. “Down, I say.”

“Down, Ringer,” repeated the Norman lord,

whose attention had now been drawn to the scene. "Down, Ringer, you say, and the dog obeys you. This is passing strange. Who are you, my handsome boy, with the eye of a prince and the clothes of a peasant?"

Edith came to Algar's side, and the latter put his arm round his sister.

"Come," said De Terni. "Do not fear to answer me. You have made me your debtor for ever."

He fixed his keen, dark eye on Algar with a searching look, but the boy met him with as proud a glance, and said,

"We are the children of Haco, the Thane of Kemsing."

De Terni started quickly, and a murmur of surprise went through the train of attendants.

"And is it so?" said the Norman lord, turning his eye from Algar to his own boy, "and did you know who he was?" pointing to his son.

"Very well," returned Algar. "We saw you ride through the village the other day."

Great lord as he was, and stern so that his household and vassals shrank before him, De Terni could not meet the firm, bright eyes of the Saxon children, but looked upon the ground.

"Who comes there?" cried one of De Terni's



ALGAR AND EDITH BEFORE DE TERNI.

attendants. "Look! Look! Stand on your guard!"

Everyone glanced in the direction of his outstretched fore-finger, and saw a tall man, dressed like a person of consequence, and followed by half-a-dozen well-armed attendants, approaching the spot. His long cloak showed that he was a Saxon, and, therefore, an enemy, and the Normans began to handle their hunting weapons, and draw into a line. At sight of him a glad cry burst from both Algar and Edith, and the little girl, running forward, flung herself into his arms.

"Oh, uncle Anlaf," she cried, "You have come at last. It was only a little while ago we were talking of you."

"I should have been here long ago, Edith," said he, "if I had known of this. But news has reached us so slowly, and been so contradictory that we have been sure of nothing."

"How dare you, Saxon, trespass upon my land in arms?" cried De Terni, his face blackening with anger.

"Thy land," returned Anlaf, in a tone of contempt, "and how long has it been thy land? But I know thy pride, Norman. Thou hast driven the noble children to peasant rags. A famous deed, in

truth. No wonder thy heart swells within thee. Look on this boy, the rightful owner of every foot of land far and near."

To the surprise of Anlaf, the Norman lord had no answer to this taunt.

The men on either side bristled up furiously, the mere sight of each other stirring anger in their hearts. But, with a sudden gesture, De Terni ordered his train to march, and turned and rode away himself without another word. The Saxons, with Wolnoth, who had guided them, at their head, were about to raise a shout of scornful laughter, when Anlaf checked them. He had been listening while Edith whispered quickly.

"So that was it," said Anlaf, "Norman as he is, he feels shame to think how Algar has repaid his robbery of your land and home. Silence, men, and back to Kemsing village."

When they reached Wolnoth's house, Githa took Edith and Algar in hand at once, and, in a trice, prepared them for their journey with their uncle Anlaf.

Two hours later the horses of Anlaf and his men were brought from the stables of the inn where they had been resting, and the Saxons prepared for the road. Algar was mounted on a forest pony,

one of a small herd which belonged to Wolnoth, and Edith was seated before her uncle.

“ We shall follow you, to-morrow, ” said Wolnoth to them, “ both Vebba and I are freemen, and can go where we list. We will settle our affairs here and take the road by early dawn. ”

A mile out of the village they crossed a hill from which a last glimpse of the great house of Kemsing could be caught. Anlaf checked his horse for a moment on the crest, and Algar reined in his pony. For a short time the boy and girl gazed upon their old home which they were leaving for ever, then they rode on over the hill, and before long, their spirits rose again, as they talked with their uncle about the new home and the new scenes to which he was carrying them.

The conquest of England was not complete until several years after the battle of Hastings, but at last William was master of the land, and ruled it for twenty-one years. He was followed by two of his sons, William II. (Rufus) and Henry I. (Beauclerc). Henry I. hoped that his daughter, Matilda, would reign after him, but the barons of England and Normandy set her claims aside, and chose Stephen, grandson of the Conqueror. A war ensued between Stephen and Matilda, in which the English people suffered great misery. For the barons, left to do as they pleased, built strong castles all over the country,

and treated the people with terrible cruelty. At last the dispute was settled by an agreement that Henry, Matilda's son, should follow Stephen. Young Henry was crowned in 1154 A.D. as Henry II., and took the reins firmly in hand at once. He was a strong King, and enforced order in every part of his wide dominions, which included not only England but the greater part of France. His great aim was to make the law of the King's courts supreme over everybody. This was soon done with the exception of the church. Clergymen had their own courts and tried their own offenders. People grumbled at this, because they said that the church courts passed very light sentences as compared with the King's courts, and Henry determined that all should be tried alike. This brought him into conflict with the church, in which his chief opponent was Thomas Becket. Becket, in his earlier days, had been the King's close friend and adviser, but upon becoming Archbishop of Canterbury he stood out boldly against Henry on behalf of the church. The quarrel ended in the death of Becket, who was slain by four of Henry's knights in 1170 A.D. This crime undid all Henry's efforts, and secured the church from interference for a long time. Henry was a great law-giver, and proved himself an able soldier in his many fights against the French and his own rebellious barons. He had several sons, but they were disobedient to him, and often headed outbreaks against his authority. Two of them, Henry and Geoffrey, died before him, and two lived on, both to become Kings of England as Richard I. and John. Henry himself died in 1189, and was succeeded by Richard, called the Lionheart for his bravery and strength.

At the time Richard came to the throne the minds of all men were filled with plans for the Third Crusade. The Crusades, that is, Wars of the Cross, were undertaken by the Christian nations of Europe with the object of driving the Mohammedan Turks from Palestine, and particularly from Jerusalem. These Turks—called Saracens—seized the Holy Land, and ill-treated the pilgrims to Jerusalem. There were several Crusades, the first being in 1095, but the Third Crusade, in which Richard of England took the lead, is the most famous one in English history.



A KNIGHT OF THE CRUSADES.

THE FAITHFUL PAGE.

- I. THE CAMP OF THE CRUSADERS.
 - II. THE BATTLE.
 - III. "O RICHARD, O MY KING."
-

I. THE CAMP OF THE CRUSADERS.

THE cloudless sun of an Eastern daybreak had just sprung above the horizon, and was gilding a thousand shining flags and pennons fluttering over the great camp, which the warriors of the Third Crusade had formed around Arsouf.

High above all rose a great banner, its broad folds embroidered with the lions of England, and announcing by its presence that the stately pavilion over which it floated held Richard Cœur De Lion, Richard the Lion Heart, the mighty soldier, the foremost champion of the Cross, the darling of the Crusaders.

At a measured distance from the tent of the King, the English men-at-arms on guard paced to and fro, their long lances held firmly upright. Nearer the pavilion, and almost under the shadow of the

Standard, was a small tent, one of whose sides was flung back, and from whose shelter came a rattling, clinking sound.

Its occupants were two in number, Clym of the Lea, the King's armourer, a big, brawny fellow, clad in a leathern jerkin, and a boy, Hubert de Tracy, a page of the royal household. Clym was working slowly and carefully over every link and joint of a gigantic suit of mail, trying it here and there with a small hammer. It had already been polished until every separate ring shone like silver. The armourer was giving his deepest attention to the work, and the boy watched with as keen an interest.

"There," said Clym, laying his hammer down, "It is ready for our noble king to don whenever he lists. It will not be long, I warrant, before it will be in the thick of Saracen lances and scimitars." *

"Is the battle close then, Clym?" said Hubert.

"It will be as soon as we can meet these heathen fellows, you may be sure," returned Clym. "Our scouts report their main force as close at hand, and if they dare to bar our way to the Holy City they

* The scimitar was the favourite sword of the Saracens. The blade was narrow and curved.

will find how easily the Lion of England will dash them aside."

"Our famous Lion Heart," cried the page. "Was there ever such another King, Clym?"

"Never such another fighter, I know," cried Clym. "No man in this army or any other army could carry this mail, or wield his weapon. And now, his axe."

Hubert ran across to the larger tent, lifted the canvas screen which fell across the entrance, and went in. A group of a dozen figures were gathered in the middle of the pavilion, talking earnestly. All were clothed in full armour except one, and he was clad only in the suit of chamois leather which knights wore under their mail.

But, though the others shone in the splendour of polished steel, inlaid with gold, and waving plumes, and embroidered surcoats, yet among all the glitter, the figure in simple leather drew the eye at once, and stood, the King, confessed.

The tall, stately form, the splendid presence, the broad, bright, blue eye, the curling, golden hair proclaimed Richard Plantagenet, the greatest figure of the day, Richard, with whose name of terror the Saracen mothers stilled their weeping children.

“Better news, my noble comrades, could not be,” said the Lion Heart, looking round the warlike ring, “We shall taste to-day, if the reports of these scouts be true, the joy of battle, and strike once more a blow on behalf of the sacred cause for which we struggle. Saladin’s forces lie directly in our path, and Moslem and Christian will tilt it out. What could we ask better? Hail to the Holy Sepulchre! Hail to the Soldiers of the Cross!” His lofty, joyous voice rang through the tent like a clarion, and his comrades, moved by this enthusiasm, struck their mailed hands together, so that the clang and clash of armour sounded out as he spoke, the most fitting accompaniment to his martial words.

While Richard was speaking, Hubert, the page, had gone to the inner tent, where the King slept. Here, near the head of the bed, stood the great battle-axe which he sought. As he raised it, its steel head struck a shield leaning against a table, and gave forth a sharp, ringing sound.

“Who dares touch my axe?” roared Richard, his attention at once drawn to his favourite weapon. “Ha! Sir Page,” he continued, with a smile of grim humour as the boy came forward, almost staggering under the weight of the

ponderous axe, "Is it thou? Dost think of taking the field to-day in Richard's stead?"

"I am bearing it to Clym of the Lea, your Highness' armourer," said the page, smiling up brightly at his master. "He hath everything else ready."

"Ha! Good Clym," returned the easily pacified monarch. "Bid him see that the gear is in good order, Hubert. If fortune favour me with a chance to use it to-day, I will not spare it." The page went on to the armourer's tent, and Richard turned again to the conference which he was holding with his chief comrades and vassals.

Some hours later, Hubert stood at the entrance of the royal tent, grasping the rein of a splendid warhorse. It was as much as he could do to hold the spirited creature in its place. It pawed the ground as if impatient to feel the weight of its royal master on its back, and tossed its head and snuffed the air proudly.

"Come, then," called the King eagerly, as he came out, followed by a brilliant train of leaders to whom he had been detailing their duties. "Come then, my masters, to horse! to horse! And let us once more carry the Cross to victory over the Crescent."*

* The Crescent was then, as it is to-day, the sign of the Turks.

At a single bound, Richard sprang into the saddle, and, by his skilful management of the reins, reduced the impatient horse to perfect stillness. He glanced over his arms carefully, saw that the great axe was swinging, ready to his hand, from the saddlebow, then turned to marshal his array.

The camp was a scene of busy confusion. Every leader was gathering his men under his banner, and forming them in lines to take their place in the order agreed upon. In the wide space before the royal pavilion, the English knights and men-at-arms were mustering rapidly under the various lords whom they followed, while, behind Richard himself, rode a strong band of the most famous and most noble warriors of England.

The King galloped to a mound near by, from which he could overlook the whole of the assembly, and, when he saw that everything was ready for departure, he gave the signal, and the movement began. Hubert, whose duties had ended for the time when the King mounted his horse, went with several companions of his own age and condition, to a hill beyond the camp to see the gallant army go by.

It was a noble sight. Soldiers from every country of Europe marched in that great array,

English, and Swedish, and German, Spanish, and French, and Italian, foes or friends elsewhere, they were one in purpose under the shadow of the Banner of the Cross. Every warrior bore the sign of the cross upon his shoulder, and it was often repeated on shield, and hauberk, and helm, in token of their mission.

The eye was dazzled by the floods of gleaming rays which the powerful Eastern sun struck from the long rows of men and horses, sheathed in complete steel, and by the crowd of dancing flags and pennons of every shape, and size, and colour, fluttering in the breeze as the glittering ranks went by.

Foremost came the English squadrons, led by Richard himself, the visor of his helmet up, his face flushed and joyous, his eyes shining like stars, and looking, with his proud and stately bearing, the mighty captain that he was, the man of all men to ride in the van of that splendid host. The hill was crowded with spectators, and with one accord, they burst out into loud acclaim.

“Long live Richard of England ! Honour to the Lion Heart !”

A little further on, a tall monk had taken his stand, and, with cowl thrown back, and a crucifix

raised on high, was exhorting the troops as they passed to fight like men that day for the Holy Sepulchre. His impassioned speech, and the sight of a second monk, who, stripped to the waist, was lashing his naked body with a scourge of knotted cords until the blood ran, aroused the religious frenzy easily awakened among the Crusaders. Up to this moment they had been shouting their national war cries.

“St. George for Merry England!” rang from the bold English yeomen.

“Mountjoye, St. Dennis!” cried the French. But now they united in one tremendous shout.

“The Holy Sepulchre. Remember the Holy Sepulchre. On to Jerusalem. On to the Holy City. It is the will of God. It is the will of God.”

Trumpets rang out their wild, warlike notes, drums boomed and thundered their deep, maddening music, and on rolled the Soldiers of the Cross, burning to meet the foe.

Hubert, lost in the scene, was cheering and shouting with the rest, when he felt his sleeve plucked from behind. He turned and saw Geoffrey de Burgh, a fellow page.

“Hubert,” said Geoffrey. “Come with me.”

The two boys pushed together through the crowd, Geoffrey talking as he went.

"The Saracens are quite close at hand," said he. "Black Ralph, the scout, came in with the latest news and I spoke with him myself. I asked him from which place the battle might best be seen, and he told me, and the hill of which he spoke I know well. Let us go in that direction."

"Away with you," cried Hubert, and the boys ran off together.



RICHARD I. OF ENGLAND.

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II.

THE BATTLE.

ON they went, keeping a little to the left of the advancing army, but never straying far from its flanks, for fear of the troops of the Saracens, who, mounted on swift horses, hung about the Christian army to cut off stragglers. In a little more than an hour, they reached the hill of which Black Ralph had spoken, and, on gaining its crest, both boys broke into a cry of admiration.

They were looking over a wide valley, on the opposite side of which a great army of their Saracen foes was drawn up in brilliant order. The sight which they presented was gayer and more captivating to the eye than even the brilliance of the Crusaders. The Eastern fondness for bright and striking colours made the army glow from the distance with all the sheen and glancing light of a great bed of jewels.

Suddenly, a clashing of cymbals and pealing of horns broke from the Saracens, and the boys saw that the first files of the Christian host had come into sight, winding round the foot of the valley, and the outburst of music had been a

proud defiance to the foe. The wild notes of the Saracens were answered by a flourish of trumpets and beating of drums, and the Crusaders hastened to prepare themselves for the encounter.

The gigantic form of Richard could easily be distinguished as he rode up and down, forming the line and marshalling his men. The Saracens already lay in battle order.

As the Crusaders advanced, the front line of the Saracens was put in motion, and rushed down the slight slope which lay in their favour. Their movement was timed to strike the Christian army just as the Crusaders rose to the slope, but this advantage was counterbalanced by the greater weight of the iron-clad knights, and the foremost lines met with a tremendous shock, and upon almost equal terms.

The thunder of the charging troops was exchanged upon an instant for all the varied tumult of a fiercely contested battle; the crashes of splintering spears, the shouts of the combatants as they struck at each other, the screams of wounded horses, blended into one mad hurly-burly of sound which arose and rolled far from the field.

“Look, Geoffrey,” cried Hubert, “How deep is the banner of England already among the foe.”

Far beyond the rest of the Crusaders, a solid plump of shining helmets could be seen surrounded by a sea of turbaned Saracens. The knights were closely gathered around the banner of England, borne in their midst, and at their head rode Richard, leading the bravest, as they led their companions.

Deeper and deeper the Lion banner was carried into the masses of the Moslem foe. The best blood of England was gathered round its staff, and the Lion Heart himself carved out their path with his dreadful axe. His great cross-handled sword, his ponderous mace swung idly at either side. To-day he was in the thick of the battle, as his soul loved, and his favourite weapon would serve him as no other could.

The white-turbaned foe swarmed and surged about him as foamy waves rise and break over some tall, lonely rock, and ever, like the rock Richard emerged unharmed from the uproar. The struggle was great and desperate. Saladin had gathered his choicest warriors there, and victory was long doubtful.

The boys followed the fortunes of the day with breathless attention. They saw the gallant band around the flag of England steadily cleaving its

way through and through the Saracen host, and ever at its head, the gigantic figure on the great black horse, his ponderous axe rising and falling unweariedly.

“They give way before him,” cried Geoffrey.
“The Saracens fly.”

“But only before the King,” said Hubert.

It was even so. Brave as the Saracens were, they began to lose courage as they drove their best and boldest in vain against Richard and his resistless strength, and gradually the combat slackened in his neighbourhood. Elsewhere, the Moslems gave not an inch. Scimitar crossed broadsword, and arrows flew in showers, and the battle was waged on either side with unyielding fury.

For an instant, on finding that the foe was drawing away from him and his band of picked spears, Richard drew rein, and breathed his gallant horse, then, gathering his knights in line, he made a fresh charge towards the thickest of the fight. In doing so he had to cross an open space, and by a sudden, adroit movement, the Saracen leader threw a body of cavalry in his path. Both men and horses, hitherto held in reserve, were perfectly fresh, and attacked the English with the utmost vigour.

Six Emirs,* evidently of the highest rank, from the beauty of their armour and their fine horses, surrounded Richard, and cut him off from his followers. Wheeling his powerful steed, Cœur-de-Lion swooped like a hawk on the nearest. The Emir met him in full career and aimed a swinging blow with his curved sword. But Richard parried it with the handle of his axe, and, without offering a return stroke, rode down man and horse by the mere weight of his charge.

Warned by the fate of their comrade, none of the others attempted to close with him, but, availing themselves of the marvellous speed of their Arab steeds, rushed upon Richard from every side, aimed a flying blow at him, and were gone before he could turn to face his assailants.

In a short time, these tactics reduced Richard to a state of sheer fury. Stroke after stroke he delivered on the empty air, and still his foes seemed but at arm's length as they made their flights at him, like swallows darting past an eagle.

Time and again the Lion Heart's armour of proof rang beneath their blows, and yet they remained untouched. The chief among them was a tall, swarthy Emir, mounted on a white horse of

* Emir was the title given to a Saracen nobleman.

surpassing beauty, and clad in mail which shone like silver.

As he made one of his arrowy darts in the direction of the King, Richard suddenly turned his charger, and dashed to meet him. But without touching the rein, the Emir turned his horse aside at right angles, and, as he did so, hurled a light, slender spear with such accuracy of aim, that had not Richard hastily flung up his shield, it must have penetrated his eye through the tiny opening in his helmet.

Cœur-de-Lion attempted to pursue his foe, but in a score of yards drew rein. He was only exhausting his horse in vain. At this moment an Arab on foot rushed straight upon Richard. His only weapon was a short, narrow-bladed scimitar.

“Ha, St. George!” cried Cœur-de-Lion, and aimed a swinging blow at him. With wonderful dexterity, the man sprang aside and avoided the axe, then, dropping almost on his hands and knees, he ran swiftly under Richard’s horse, passing completely under the animal.

But, swift as was his passage, he had achieved his aim, and mortally wounded the noble creature. With a scream of agony it reared almost upright, then rolled over on its side. Swinging his feet

from the stirrups, Richard sprang clear of his dying horse, and when the Saracens closed upon him, he bounded like a deer at the foremost, and swung his axe on high.

The blow lighted upon the horseman's shoulder with terrific force, and hurled him from the saddle. Richard attempted to seize the reins, but the steed bolted away in terror. Once more the Emir on the white horse rode at the King with another uplifted spear, at the same time calling upon his companions to attack the Lion Heart in the rear. *Cœur-de-Lion* half turned as if to meet the enemy behind, then suddenly wheeled round, dropped his battle-axe, swung up with both hands the triangular shield which had been hanging round his neck, and hurled it full at the Emir.

The latter bent down and interposed his small, round buckler, but with so sure an aim, and so powerful an arm had the heavy missile been flung that the Moslem was beaten out of the saddle, and lay, stunned and bleeding, on the ground.

With agility, wonderful in one who had already made such tremendous exertions, and was clothed in such heavy armour, Richard bounded forward and grasped the mane of the beautiful, white charger. In a second more, he was safely seated in

Knall



RICHARD AND THE EMIR.

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truly & ever truly
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the Saracen's place, and, with a roar of triumph, he urged the wonderful speed of his new mount against the remaining Emirs.

These gave way before him, and he dashed towards the heart and thick of the battle shouting his war cry. He was followed by his famous lances, who like their master had been hacking their way through the clouds of enemies opposed to them.

Richard and his English knights appeared upon that part of the field at a critical moment. Both sides, closely matched and almost exhausted, had paused for an instant in the deadly struggle. The appearance of Richard, riding an Arab steed adorned with gay Moslem trappings, and driving the Saracens before him in crowds as a whirlwind drives leaves in autumn, reanimated the failing powers of the Crusaders.

They re-echoed his cry, "The Holy Sepulchre! Remember the Holy Sepulchre!" and pressed eagerly at his wake to renew the combat. This vigorous onset determined the day. For awhile, the troops of Saladin struggled sullenly to withstand the Christian host, but the latter could not be checked. The spirit of the Lion Heart ran from breast to breast, and rank to rank.

"Victory, victory," they shouted, even before it

was assured, "Down with the infidel. On to Jerusalem," then, with an overwhelming shout, they joined in the cry so constantly on the lips of the Crusaders. "God wills it, God wills it," and, with that cry, so furious a charge was made that the Saracens could stand no longer before them, but broke and fled in hopeless rout.



CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE, JERUSALEM.

III.

O RICHARD, O MY KING.

THE battle was over. The victorious Crusaders had returned to their camp. Richard had been uncased by his squires of his armour, and was resting in his tent, and again, Clym of the Lea was working over the mail, straightening rings which had been bent by the furious blows received during the day, and cleansing the dark stains of battle from its brightness.

"O Richard, O my King," hummed Hubert, who was looking on, as in the morning.

"What is that?" said Clym.

"O Richard, O my King," repeated Hubert.

"Where did you hear it?" asked the armourer.

"Yesterday morning," began Hubert. "I was busy in the King's tent, and Blondel was sitting there, playing lightly on his harp, and singing in a soft voice to himself."

"Ay, ay," said Clym, "Blondel, the minstrel. It is the first line of a song, I'll warrant you."

"It sounds like it," said Hubert. "I heard no more than that. He sang it, and then stopped as if he were thinking out the next lines."

There was silence for a time, then the boy burst out, "And is he not a king to live for, Clym, our mighty Richard?"

"A good many of us have done more than that, we have died for him," said Clym, gravely, for he had that day left his dear friend William of Woodford beneath a heap of Moslem slain.

"Ay, and a king to die for, too," cried Hubert. "I would die a thousand times, and by a thousand deaths to serve or pleasure him."

Clym smiled grimly. "You can give him but one in any fashion," said he "and he is like enough to demand it of you as soon as your chin begins to put forth a beard."

"And he shall have it willingly," cried the boy, "willingly."

Clym said nothing, but gave his attention to a broken ring in the mail, and Hubert returned to the pavilion. Here, all was joyous uproar.

Just as Hubert entered, Cœur-de-Lion was calling on his favourite, Blondel, the famous singer.

"Come," cried Richard, "Hast thou never a lay for us, Blondel? Here is an occasion to fire a famous minstrel, as thou art, to highest pitch of song. Great deeds of arms, the glory of victory, what fairer theme can'st thou demand? It is the

very field for the noble science of song to show its brightest efforts."

Blondel smiled, and bowed, without speaking, then struck his harp with light, thoughtful touches as if running over in his mind the song he was about to sing. The sound given forth by one of the strings did not please him, and he twanged it sharply. It rang falsely, and he raised his hand to a silken cord which hung round his neck. But the cord was empty, and he glanced up. His eye fell upon Hubert, and the minstrel beckoned the boy, who came instantly forward.

"Hubert," said Blondel, "run instantly to the tent of Arthur de Boville. He has borrowed my wrest, thou knowest it, the key with which I tune my harp. Bring it to me on the instant."

"Willingly, dear Blondel," said the boy, and ran at once. Outside, the evening was drawing on. Westward, the sky was still flaming with the sunset, but in the opposite quarter the swift Eastern dusk was darkening the horizon. Hubert hurried quickly across the wide, vacant space which lay between the pavilion of Richard and the rows of tents which held his followers.

Suddenly the page stopped, and looked round him. Where were the yeomen of the guard, who,

as a rule, held jealous watch about the pavilion on every side? Not one of them was in sight. Amid the general uproar of the camp, this patch of ground was lonely and quiet.

The loosening of discipline which follows the day of battle and victory, had left the King's tent but carelessly guarded, for who would expect an onslaught from a beaten and flying foe?

After a glance round, Hubert ran on again. He had scarcely gone a dozen yards when he felt himself firmly gripped by the ankle, and he pitched forward on his face. Before he could utter a cry, a hand was placed on his throat, and he heard a quiet voice at his ear threatening him with death if he made a sound. At the same moment, his hands were seized and secured behind his back, and he was allowed to rise.

Hubert saw that his captor was a man dressed in the fantastic attire of the Eastern jugglers, who were permitted to frequent the camp of the Crusaders in large numbers. The light also shone on a keen *poniard offered at his breast.

“You are a page of Richard of England,” said one of the men in *Lingua Franca*, the language used in intercourse between the Crusaders and the inhabi-

* A poniard is a small dagger.

tants of the country. "I know it by your dress."

"What do you want with me?" demanded Hubert.

"A simple matter," replied the man, "we wish you to lead us to that part of the pavilion where lies the inner tent in which the King sleeps."

"For what purpose?" said Hubert.

The man waved his hand. "Will you do it or not?" he said.

"And if I refuse?" asked Hubert.

The man pointed to the glowing west. "Then you have seen the sun set for the last time," he said.

Hubert trembled for a moment. The tone in which his captor spoke was so smooth, and calm, and dreadful, that it was clear that he had fallen into the hands of no common, hired stabbers.

He knew well enough for what purpose they required his guidance. More than one attempt had been made to assassinate Richard, but never one planned at such a moment as this, when every circumstance conspired to throw suspicion off its guard.

Hubert turned his head and looked upon the second man, who had not spoken at all. The sight of him confirmed the boy's fears. He was a small man, thin and wiry, and almost naked, the upper part of his body and his limbs shining with oil. He

had no weapon but a short, broad dagger. Such a nimble, active fellow could slip through the hands of a crowd, and strike down his prey in the very centre of apparent safety.

"Come," said the first man, "Do you agree, or are we to lightly scratch your skin?" He flourished his weapon, and Hubert understood. The daggers were poisoned, and a touch meant death. The boy looked around. No one was near. To cry out would be useless.

"I will lead you to the tent," said Hubert, gasping.

"It is well," said the captor. "I thought you would have no fancy for a grave in the desert sand." Hubert said nothing. His face was very white, as he moved back towards the pavilion between the two Saracens.

"And have you no fear of being caught!" he asked, after a moment.

"Fear," laughed the first man. "In the way you mean fear, none at all. My little fellow," he continued, patting Hubert's shoulder, "within the hour, we look to be in * Paradise."

* The Mohammedans are taught that to kill one who does not believe in their faith is a praiseworthy act, and ensures the slayer an entrance into their Paradise.

As they slowly moved over the space Hubert had already crossed, the man who had done all the speaking, grasped the boy's arm firmly, and replaced his dagger in the sash he wore around his waist. In its stead, he drew a short, curved scimitar and held it before his body. Their plan was easy to divine. They would slash an opening in the canvas walls of the tent at such a place as to give entrance to its most private part.

Even if Richard were in the outer tent, yet a great advantage would be given to the assailant, who would make his rush from an unexpected point. Both men were careless as to what happened to themselves, and were willing to give their own lives so that they took that of the terror of their nation.

On they glided, drawing the unresisting boy between them, until they were within forty yards of the pavilion. Still, all was silent and solitary without, and all was noise and gaiety within.

"At which end?" demanded the Saracen.

"Come this way," said Hubert.

Feeling confident that they had frightened the boy into agreement with their purpose, the Moslems turned in the direction which he indicated with his head, and Hubert led them on. Suddenly, as if at a

signal, the loud talking in the tent ceased, and the ringing voice of Richard alone was heard.

“Come, Blondel, we will delay no longer. Take thou my harp, and strike up thy stave. I will see that rogue page soundly whipped for his idle loitering. Come, come.” As Richard ceased speaking there was absolute silence for a moment, and Hubert seized his opportunity.

“Treason! Treason!” he screamed, “St. George for England! the foe! the foe!”

As the piercing cry burst out, the Saracen, his nerves keenly strung to the attempt near at hand, gave a great start and Hubert felt his grasp loosen. With a great effort, the boy tore himself free and flew towards the tent, to whose mouth he had been directly leading the way.

As he did so, the canvas flap screening the entrance of the tent was flung back. Instantly, a great blaze of light leapt out, and those within the pavilion saw the page spring into view, followed on the bound by the half-naked, shining Saracen. Careless of his own safety, and despairing of his main object, since Richard was now surrounded by a ring of aroused followers, the assassin caught up Hubert and struck him one fierce blow, to fall himself the next moment under the attack of those nearest.

Amid a confusion of shouting officers, guards running to and fro, and the uproar of a disturbed camp, Hubert told his story. It was scarcely necessary, for the figure of the Saracen himself made everything plain to such experienced eyes.

“Run,” called Richard to one of his squires, “and fetch the best leech * in the camp. Carry the lad in and lay him on my bed, and do one of you staunch the wound as well as you can until the leech arrives.” And he himself hurried out of the tent to quell the growing tumult which the alarm had occasioned. The squire returned almost immediately with the physician whose tent was near at hand, and the latter gave his attention to the wound.

After a time Richard returned, saying, “A second one the lad spoke of, but he is nowhere to be found. A fine watch my lazy knaves were keeping, and they shall be held to account for it. Well,” he continued, as the leech came from the inner apartment, “How does the lad?”

“His wound is mortal, sire,” returned the physician.

“Say not so, Sir Leech,” cried the King. “Canst thou not do something?”

* In those days the name leech, as well as physician, was used for a man who practised medicine.

“No mortal skill can avail, my liege,” said the man, “the dagger was poisoned.”

“Ay,” cried Cœur de Lion, “poisoned for me! A deeper and better laid plot was never set on foot. To come at such a time and in such desperate guise. That fellow had reached me easily unless the warning had been given,” and he went hastily to the inner tent, where Hubert lay on the Royal couch surrounded by a group of the King’s attendants.

“My gallant Hubert,” said Cœur de Lion, laying his hand gently on the boy’s shoulder. “As I am belted knight, and anointed King, I would give the fairest province I possess, to see thee healed of this villain’s stroke.”

The dying boy looked up with a bright smile, collected his remaining strength to press the famous hand of his beloved master, and murmured, “O Richard, O my King.”

Blondel, the minstrel, was standing on the further side of the bed. He caught the faintly spoken words, and looked up quickly. Then a grave smile of understanding passed over his face, and he softly plucked a few deep, sweet notes from the harp which he held in his hand.

Outside the tent, a ring of English men-at-arms had gathered, and among them stood Clym of the

Lea. The physician came out, and several pressed around him. Then a whisper ran through the crowd.

“And is he dead?” said Clym of the Lea, raising his hand, and letting it fall by his side, “Well-a-day! Brave little heart! But neither of us dreamed he would make his words good so soon as this.”

[Richard Cœur de Lion met with many strange adventures, both while in Palestine and on his return home. When making his way back to England, he was wrecked in the Adriatic, and afterwards fell into the hands of the Duke of Austria, with whom Richard had quarrelled during the Crusade. The Duke handed Richard over to the Emperor of Germany, who shut him up in prison, nor did he get free again until a great ransom had been paid by the English. Five years later Richard was besieging a small castle in France when he met his death, being slain by an arrow. He was followed by his brother John, a false, cruel, and wicked King, who managed to quarrel with everybody. John had a long and bitter dispute with the Pope, but the latter won in the end. His barons also rose against him, and forced him to sign a very important document—Magna Charta—the Great Charter securing the rights and liberties of the people. Next came Henry III., son of John, in whose long reign the power of Parliament was greatly strengthened, because, for the first time, representatives from counties, cities, and boroughs sat together in Parliament (1265.) Next came Edward I. (1272–1307), a great King, and famous both as

a warrior and a law-giver. He subdued Wales, and tried to bring Scotland under English authority, but without success. He was followed by Edward II., his son (1307-1327), a weak, foolish King, who was deposed and put to death in 1327. Edward III. (1327-1377), son of the last King, was another great warrior-king. He and his famous son, the Black Prince, overran France, and won the battles of Crecy (1346) and Poitiers (1356). But the Black Prince died before his father, and his son, Richard (1377-1399) came to the throne in 1377. The government of the country had been so careless and bad that money was very much wanted, and heavy taxes were imposed. In 1381 a tax was announced of one shilling per head on every person above fifteen, rich and poor paying alike. This caused much discontent, and the commons, already long dissatisfied with their condition, broke out into rebellion all over the south and east of England. In the south the leader was a man named Wat Tyler. In Essex the peasants were led by a man who called himself Jack Straw.)



ARABIAN SWORD AND SCABBARD.

Bew

THE PEASANTS' REBELLION.

- I. "DEATH TO THE LAWYERS."
 - II. WHY THE PEASANTS ROSE.
 - III. HOB O' THE MILL'S STORY.
-

I.

"DEATH TO THE LAWYERS."

It was a beautiful June evening in the year 1381, and the voices of children at play rang merrily from a field which lay behind a large house, facing one of the main roads of Kent. The children were three in number. Roger, a boy of thirteen, was shooting with bow and arrow, taking careful aim at a small, white patch which he had cut on the trunk of a great beech, forty paces away. Behind him, his sister, Sybil, two or three years younger, was rolling little Hugh in the hay which lay in fragrant heaps about the meadow.

With a sharp crack, Roger's bowstring snapped as he drew it to his ear, and his shooting came to an end for the moment. Never mind, he had two

or three more strings in the house, and he ran to fetch one.

As he crossed a narrow strip of garden, a sound came to his ear which drew his attention at once. It was a mingled murmur of voices and trampling of feet coming faintly from the distance. Wondering what it could be, for, as a rule, the road was perfectly quiet and solitary at this time of the evening, the boy threw down his bow, and ran to a lofty ash at the further end of the garden.

He nimbly climbed to its upper branches, and looked out. From this point he could see clearly over the low trees which lay in the direction of the noise, and he commanded a long stretch of the high road. What was that great crowd marching steadily along the white, dusty track? Hundreds and hundreds of men were coming on in a close, compact body.

Roger had no idea of what it could mean, and he slipped down the tree, and ran quickly through the wood towards the advancing mob. In a few minutes he had reached a point where he could look out on the road from the screen of a thick holly bush, and see them pass close by.

He had scarcely gained his hiding-place when they came up. They were peasants, to a man. Some

were of the better sort, coarsely but comfortably dressed in hodden gray, others of the poorer class, serfs or villeins,* filthy and ragged, but all carrying some kind of weapon. Fierce resolution was on the brow and in the step of every man, and a fear of them—he knew not why—came over the boy, and he shuddered.

Then he feared in earnest, for the leader, a tall, rawboned, elderly man of the poorer class, turned and called out in a low, savage voice to his followers. He was quite close to Roger, and the boy's quick eye caught sight of a strange mark on the peasant's forehead. The man's face was glowing with excitement and fury, but in the midst of his reddened brow a white, seared scar shone out in the form of the letter F.

As Roger wondered what it meant, the man's voice rang over the crowd in fierce, passionate tones. "Now, lads," he cried, "here's a lawyer's house, here's another chance for revenge. They've bound us fast with their writings long enough. It's our turn to-day."

* Serfs, or villeins were men who were bound to the land upon which they lived. The master of the land was their master, and they were not permitted to go elsewhere without his permission. In early times their position was no better than that of slavery.

Roger turned, and went through the wood like a greyhound. His father, Master William Fitz Stephen, was a lawyer, and it was their house which was to be attacked. He understood that clearly, and he knew, moreover, that his father was at home, for he had heard him ride into the courtyard half-an-hour back. Luckily, the high road looped round, and the path went back to the house straight as an arrow, so that Roger gained easily on the rioters.

The boy darted into the hall and ran to his father's business room. Here was Master Fitz Stephen, as busy as possible, sorting over a great heap of deeds and parchments which lay on the table. He was putting some carefully aside, and flinging others on a heap already blazing on the broad hearth. He seemed disturbed and uneasy, and looked up quickly as his son came in.

"Father," said Roger, gasping for his breath, "There's a great crowd of people coming up the road, they,"—Roger stopped and panted, but there was no need to say more. His father started, and turned pale, and threw up his hand as if he quite understood.

"Then I must be quick," said Master Fitz Stephen, "for that crowd must not find me here, my boy. Take

this cord, and bind it quickly round this packet of deeds. The rest must abide their fate."

As he spoke, he hastily threw back the mass of parchment scrolls* into two large iron boxes and locked them.

"What is the matter, father?" said Roger, "And what do those men want?"

"The matter, my son," said Master Fitz Stephen, "the matter is that the discontent, which has been smouldering for so many years among the peasants, has now blazed out into open rebellion, and they have marked out my profession for the roughest usage."

"Where will you go to escape them, father?" cried Roger.

"To John of the Pool's house," said Master Fitz Stephen. "I shall be safe there till nightfall, then I can go further. But we must be quick. I had no idea of such short warning as this."

Father and son slipped quietly along a passage which led to a private opening into the garden, and went swiftly out. The rioters were now close at hand, and Roger eagerly pulled his father along.

"Run, my boy," said Master Fitz Stephen," and

*A scroll is a sheet of writing, and parchment is the skin of the sheep prepared so that it may be written upon.

bring Sybil and Hugh to the little wood behind the house. I will keep among the trees, so that no one can see me, and will await you by the spring."

But, even as he spoke, a loud crashing of branches and babble of voices told that a body of men was coming directly towards them, and that the house was beset, front and rear.

"Oh, father, whatever shall we do?" said Roger, pale and trembling for his father's safety.

"Courage, Roger," said Master Fitz Stephen, laying his hand on his son's shoulder, "We must turn into the hayfield, and hope they will pass us by, and go directly to the house."

"Father, father," whispered Roger eagerly, as a sudden thought struck him, "Hide in the hay! Hide in the hay!"

"My quick-witted Roger," said his father softly, "an excellent device."

The men in the wood were now close at hand, but the merry chatter of the laughing children was closer still, and how great was little Hugh's delight on seeing his father join in their play, flinging himself down, and drawing his stately, furred robe,*

* In those days, every profession had its own dress, just as the clergy have still. A lawyer wore a robe, edged with fur.

close about him, while Roger tossed over him great armfuls of hay.

"Come Sybil," said the boy, "Throw hay on father as quickly as you can. And go on laughing as if it was all fun. And never mind that noise. Just keep on playing as before."

To make good his words, Roger raised an anxious, shaky laugh, and puzzled Sybil obediently helped to cover her father from view. In another moment half a dozen heads were thrust over the gate which led into the field. Little Hugh's merry laughter and innocent prattle saved them. Roger and Sybil did their utmost to appear lively and unconcerned, but the tiny boy, delighted with the new turn the game had taken, crowed and chattered so gaily that they seemed just a merry party at play, and nothing more.

"'Tis naught but childer sporting in the hay," said one. "Best to leave them there."

"Ay, ay," said his comrades, "we've naught against them," and they went on to the house.

Roger crept to the gate, and watched them out of sight through the tall hawthorn hedges, then slipped into the wood and looked about there. He went back to the field.

"It is all quiet in the wood, father," said he to



HIDING MASTER FITZ STEPHEN IN THE HAY.

STEPHEN REID 1901

the great heap of hay. Master Fitz Stephen shook himself free, and out he crept. He caught up Hugh in his arms at once, Roger and Sybil took each other's hands, and away all three ran for the cover of the wood. Just as they entered it, the main body of rioters came up, and attacked the house with a tremendous shout :—

“ Death to the lawyers. Death to the lawyers.”

They were answered by their comrades who had arrived from the opposite direction, and a deafening uproar arose. Greedy outcries for plunder, banging and crashing in of doors and window frames, the clatter of heavy articles tossed through the upper casements and falling on the flagged courtyard, a hubbub of wild sounds pursued the fugitives as they flitted through the trees. Master Fitz Stephen kept wide of the path, and when they were safely among the thick of the bushes, he slackened his pace, and reassured his frightened children.

“ There is nothing to fear now,” he said, cheerily, “ We are all of us safe together, and we shall soon reach John of the Pool's house.”

John of the Pool was a farmer who lived on the other side of the wood, and at his farm Master Fitz Stephen hoped to find shelter. Nor was the hope

vain. Dame Cicely, John's wife, was at home, and she hid Master Fitz Stephen at once in the loft, and put the younger children to bed in an upper chamber, lest someone, seeing them there should suspect that their father was not far off. Roger remained with his father, and when it was growing dusk, Dame Cicely brought them some supper. When they had finished, Master Fitz Stephen bade his son lie down in the hay with which the loft was nearly filled. Roger did so, but determined to remain awake in case anything should happen, but gradually, as the darkness drew on, he became more and more drowsy, and was soon sleeping soundly.



II.

WHY THE PEASANTS ROSE.

WHEN Roger went down to the farmhouse kitchen next morning, he found John of the Pool sitting at the door, mending a hay rake.

"Where is my father, John?" asked the boy.

"He went away an hour before it was light," said John, looking up from his rake.

"Gone away!" cried Roger.

"He has gone to London," said the farmer.

"To London!" said Roger. "Then he will see mother, and tell her we're all right."

"It stands to reason that she'll be uneasy," said John of the Pool, "when the stories of the last day or two's doings get to her ears."

"She has gone to see grandfather, at his house in Eastcheap," said Roger. "But what will happen to father on the road if he meets those rioters?"

"There's nothing to fear," said John. "He's riding my old bay mare, and wearing my Sunday suit."

Roger laughed, and clapped his hands.

"He doesn't look much like a lawyer now," went on the farmer, "but that's all the better for him. I passed Lawyer à-Combe's house last night, over

beyond Rushford, and it was all in flames. Nor had he been so lucky as you. He had no warning, but was caught and killed out of hand."

"Why are they doing these dreadful things?" cried the boy.

John of the Pool laid down the rake, and looked thoughtfully before him.

"They are not satisfied with things as they are," said he. "I've seen this growing for many years, and knew that an outbreak was not far off."

"What has it grown from?" pursued the boy.

"To get to the bottom of things you must go back three-and-thirty years," said his companion.

"That's a long time, indeed," said Roger.

"It seems short enough to me," replied John of the Pool, smiling. "However, there it is. Thirty-three years ago I was a lad of fifteen, working for a ropemaker over at Fell's Hanger, about six miles from here. That was the year 1348, when the Black Death came to England.

"Before ever it drew near us, we heard dreadful stories of folks, hale and well one moment, dropping the next under the stroke of this dreadful pestilence, and dying very shortly.

"The very weather and the signs of the sky were unnatural. First we had fearful droughts, so that

the earth was like a furnace, the grass burned off the fields, and great cracks gaped wide in the parched soil. Then tremendous downpours of rain followed, filling the air with thick mists, and turning everywhere to a swamp. Still we hoped the foul disease would miss us, but we were stricken one day without a word of warning.

“ My master went in the morning to Bromley Fair, as well and sound a man as ever stepped, and came back just after sunset complaining of shivering fits of cold. His hair, too, bristled up like a wild animal's. Before long he was in dreadful pain, and to the terror of all, the fatal sign of the Plague was discovered upon him. It was a little hard kernel, no bigger than a pea, which moved with a touch under the skin of the armpit. The next day he died, and, before night, a dozen more were ill in the village.

“ Then the Plague ran on from house to house like a fire, sparing no one, not even the beasts, the horse in the stable, and the ox in his stall.

“ Within five weeks, Fell's Hanger was a village of the dead. It counted nigh upon fifty houses, and, sure to be, three hundred people. There was not a living soul left in it, and the place has been deserted from that day.

“It is not a month since I was passing on that road, and I stopped, and looked about me, for old acquaintance’ sake. The thatch had fallen in, leaving the ridge poles bare, doors had rotted from their hinges, the walls stood green and mouldering, a mere dead carcase of a place, standing just as it was left when the people died out of it.”

“But you escaped, John,” said Roger, “or you could not be here now.”

“Ay, but I was the only one,” replied John of the Pool, “and not being a native, I started for home as soon as my master was dead. I remember well, too, that as I was passing the house of a man called Tibb Strong, I had a mind for a drink of water. I turned to the door, but Tibb called on me to hold back. The news had got abroad that the pestilence was in Fell’s Hanger, and there I saw Tibb standing within the house, his bow drawn to his ear, and a cloth yard shaft laid full on my breast.”

“‘I wish you no harm, John,’ said he, ‘but cross that threshold you shall not. Off with you.’ You may be sure I needed no second bidding, but put my feet to the ground and ran like a hare. But a broad arrow could not keep out the Plague, and within a fortnight, we heard that Tibb and every

one of his family were smitten down to death. When I was coming over yonder, beside the pool," and John pointed to the mere, a hundred yards away, which gave him his name, "my father was standing at this very door where we sit, and he shouted on me to stop.

"Then he brought burning brands and dry wood, and kindled a fire midway between us. He bade me strip myself to the skin, and burn every rag of clothing I wore, even to my boots. I did as he said, and, when they were all crackling merrily, ran to the pool and leaped in, and swam about here and there, thinking to further cleanse myself from the infection. And after that I went home."

"And did any one in your house catch it?" asked Roger.

"Never a sign of it came near us," replied John, "but, within the twelvemonth, a good half of the people died, high and low. And 'twas this Plague which caused the trouble to-day."

"However could it do that?" cried the boy.

"Why, it was in this way," replied John.

"Half the labourers had died, and so there was more work than there were hands to do it. The men who were left saw their opportunity and demanded higher wages, and when they got what they had

asked for at first, then they rose again until many a farmer left his crops ungathered since the price of the labour would cost more than they were worth.

“Next the Parliament stepped in, and ordered the labourers to work for the old wages of times before the Plague, and that led to much grumbling. Time and again the Parliament tried to put the workfolk in the place they held before the Black Death came, but it was no easy task, for a man would slip away from his own parish or county if he didn't like the wages in those parts, and go elsewhere. Well, about twenty years ago, a law was passed that every man was to stop in his native place, and if he was caught trying to escape, he was to be burned in the forehead with an iron made to the shape of the letter F.”

“Then I saw one of those men last night,” cried Roger, “He had an F right in the middle of his forehead.”

“Ay, ay,” said John, “like enough. I saw a man once burned so at Bromley. And oh, the screech he set up when his naked flesh hissed under the red-hot iron.”

“That was very cruel,” said Roger, “and no wonder it made men angry. But why do they hate lawyers so much?”

“Ah, that’s another thing of which you must hear, before you can understand the present disturbance,” said the farmer. “In old times men paid rent for their land by performing a certain amount of labour for the landlord, just as many are compelled to do to-day.

“Afterwards, those who could afford it began to pay money in place of labour, and the lawyer made a deed of agreement to that effect between the man and his master. But, after the Black Death, labour was so dear, that it was much more profitable to the landlord that he should be paid in work rather than money.

“So what did many of them do? They begged the lawyers to find some flaw or other in the agreements which they had made with their tenants, so that the agreements could be broken and the tenants forced back to the old labour terms.

“This has made many people very bitter against lawyers. And as for those who had made no such agreements, but who are bound to the land, and are still in a state of servitude, why, they think that in destroying the houses of the lawyers, and in burning the rolls of the manor

courts,* they will destroy the deeds which give their masters legal authority over them, and so free themselves."

"But haven't the people been grumbling very much about the taxes as well?" asked Roger.

"Yes, yes," said John. "There was a poll tax in 1379 ranging from 4d. on a labourer to £6 13s. 4d. on a duke, and again this year there is a tax of 3 groats a head on everybody over fifteen, rich and poor paying just the same. These taxes have aroused much ill-feeling, but they are only the matches which have been set to the fire. The fire itself has been laid long enough."

At this moment, Dame Cicely called from within the house bidding Roger come to his breakfast, and the boy thanked John of the Pool, and went, thinking carefully over what he had heard.

After breakfast, he slipped away through the wood, and ran back home. He was anxious to see in what state the rioters had left their house. He trotted swiftly through the last bushes, and looked out, but the familiar gables no longer peeped over the trees of the garden. Roger stood still for a

*In former times, each great land owner had the authority of a judge over the people living on his estate, or manor. He tried all offenders within his bounds in his manor court, and there also was kept the record of all serfs, and what duties his tenants owed to the estate.

moment, then went on again. Their dear old home, with its quaint, black beams running across the walls, and staircase climbing up outside to its upper chambers, had vanished, and, in its stead, lay a heap of black, smouldering ashes.

The garden, with its flowers and fruit trees, lay quiet and beautiful, the strong June sun marked the hour sharply on the dial perched on a mossy pillar of stone, everything was as Roger had seen it on many and many a morning, but for the gloomy pile which marked the peasant's vengeance.

"It might have been worse," thought Roger, as he went back through the trees. "Suppose they had caught father." When he reached the farmhouse again, he found Dame Cicely busy in the kitchen.

"They have burned our house to the ground," said Roger.

"Dear, dear," cried she. "Think of that, now! Never did I dream of seeing such doings in my life! And they might have left your house alone, for though plenty of lawyers be bad enough, yet Master FitzStephen has the good word of everybody. And there's my brother Hob, who works at the mill, he's marched off with a band to London, saying that things must be altered, and now's the time to do it. And where it will end I can't say."

III.

HOB O' THE MILL'S STORY.

SEVERAL days later, Roger was at the side of the pool, amusing Sybil and Hugh by sailing for them a boat which he had cut out of a block of wood, when he saw, coming up to them, a man who limped as if footsore. The man came nearer, and Roger knew him. It was Hob o' the Mill, Dame Cicely's brother, returning from London.

Roger ran at once to fetch John of the Pool, for he knew very well that the farmer would be eager to hear what his brother-in-law had to tell. John was at work more than a mile away, and, by the time they got back to the house, Hob had refreshed himself with a good meal, and was ready and willing to relate all the news to his earnest listeners.

"Well," began Hob, "you know what a crowd of men marched from these parts. Such a great crowd of us, I never did see before in my life, neither on fair day, nor feast day, nor bear-baiting time. But when we got to Blackheath, outside London, our crowd was only a drop in a bucket.

"I marched up a little hill, and looked out, and the

land was covered with folks as far as the eye could see. And every man had come ready to take his share, whether it might turn out talking or fighting.

“Most of us had brought bow and arrows, others had sword and buckler, some carried pitchforks and scythe blades fixed on poles, and those who could furnish themselves with nothing better, e’en marched with a great stick over their shoulders. Well, you may judge there was noise enough for one thing, some arguing about their rights, some grumbling about the lords and lawyers, everyone crying out against John of Gaunt* (who, ’tis said, gives very bad advice to his nephew, the King), and plenty more just running about to get some food after their long march.

“But soon the word was passed round for every man to be quiet, for John Ball, the priest, was going to preach to us.”

“And you saw this John Ball, Hob, of whom there has been so much talk?” said Cicely.

“Saw him, sister,” said Hob. “I was not twenty yards from the man, as he stood in a waggon to speak to us. Ay, and a good preacher.

*John of Gaunt was the fourth son of Edward III. He was no friend to the people, who repaid him with the bitterest dislike.

too. A voice like a bull, and a man on the edge of the crowd might hear him."

"And what might his text have been?" asked John of the Pool.

"You'd never guess," said Hob, his eye twinkling. "It wasn't from the Scriptures."

"Not from the Scriptures," said John of the Pool, shaking his head, doubtfully. "'Twas not a proper sermon then."

"It suited his hearers, at any rate," replied Hob. "It fitted them like hand and glove, for he preached on the old saying, 'When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then a gentleman?' And what he wanted to know was where the landlords got their right to hold us to the land like beasts of burden, calling on us to do their will, right or wrong, and then he went on to show that all men are born equal, and it's against nature for one man to have rights over his brother man."

"Well, well, never mind the sermon," said John of the Pool. "What did you do next?"

"Why, it was said that the King was coming down the river to meet some of our leaders, and come to a settlement about things," said Hob. "But he was advised against it, and went back.

From Blackheath, we marched on through a place called Southwark, and so came to London. Tall houses standing thicker than trees in a wood, high walls, fine shops, never did I see such a place in my life.

“Well, the Lord Mayor and some of his people tried to shut the gates, and keep us out of the City, but, bless you, we had scores and scores of friends inside, and they had the gates open in a trice, and in we went

“Then somebody said that they were breaking open the prisons, so Tim Sly, Jack Tapster, and myself, for we kept together all the time, went to see what was happening, and, sure enough, there were the great doors beaten in, and the rogues who had been cooped up inside were skipping out as nimbly as ever men ran for freedom. For our part we did not like the look of this.”

“‘Tis putting the wrong face on things,’ said Tim Sly. ‘For if we let rogues go free we shall be thought no better than they. We ought to act in everything just as honest Englishmen seeking an honest end.’”

“Well said, Tim!” said John of the Pool.

“It was the opinion of all of us,” said Hob, “but the thing was done and not now to be

mended. Then there was a general cry to go to the Savoy to take revenge on John of Gaunt who was the worst enemy of the peasants, and 'Burn and kill' were the best words for him in the mouths of all.

"Some, who knew the way, led on there, but the job had been done already, and we saw a great, fine house all in flames. But here, it is certain, there was no kindly feeling to thieves, for, as a fellow passed us, Tim Sly caught a glimpse of something shining under his cloak, and Jack Tapster and two more seized him, and drew a silver cup from his bosom. He had brought it from the burning house."

"And what did they do with him?" asked Cicely.

"Pitched him into the flames, cup and all," said Hob.

Cicely shuddered and John of the Pool whistled softly.

"Where was the King?" said John.

"Shut up in the Tower," replied Hob. "With his mother and some of his chief men."

"And you couldn't get in there?" said John.

"Not at first," returned Hob, "but we did afterwards, and I never want to see again the

sights I saw there. What possessed our leader, Wat Tyler, I don't know, but he seemed to think he would gain all he wanted by killing the people who gave advice to the King. Several soldiers of the Tower guard were put to death at once, and then two great men, one the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the other a man they call the Lord Treasurer*, were brought out to a place named Tower Hill, and there they had their heads chopped off."

"O, Hob!" cried Cicely.

"You may well cry out," said Hob o' the Mill. "It gave me a turn to see such things, and Tim Sly, Jack Tapster, and I went back to the alehouse where we were quartered, resolved to take no part in them. We had come quite ready to fight for our rights, but to put men to death in cold blood was another matter."

"Right, right!" called out John of the Pool.

"Well," said Hob, "At the very time we got into the Tower the King had gone to a place called Mile End, and met some of our people, and agreed that bondage should be done away with. This

* The Lord Treasurer had charge of the money accounts of the kingdom. His position corresponded with that of the Prime Minister of the present day.

satisfied the men who had come from Essex, and away they went home."

"And didn't you start home as well, Hob?" asked Roger.

"We did not," said he "for the word went round that the King would meet Wat Tyler the next day at Smithfield, just outside the city, and as Wat Tyler was our leader, we thought it was our business to stop and see what would be settled there. So the next morning we marched in good order to Smithfield, every man with his weapons, and all in good heart, for we felt certain that our terms would be granted us."

"What were you going to ask for, Hob?" said his sister, Dame Cicely.

"Three things," replied Hob, holding up his thumb and two fingers, and starting to tap them off one at a time.

"First, that labour should be free, and no man be bound to till the fields, and gather in the harvests of a landlord for nothing, just because he happened to be born on that estate. Next, that every man should have liberty to buy and sell, just as he liked, in fairs and markets. Next, that the rent of land should be fixed at fourpence an acre."

"Ay, ay," said John of the Pool, shaking his head, "the nation has never seen such changes as that."

"When we got to Smithfield," went on Hob, "We formed our ranks, and stood waiting, Wat Tyler and two or three others in front, ready to speak with the King. Before long, we saw a great band of horsemen riding towards us, and at the head of them a boy on a fine bay nag, and that was the King."

"Tell us of the King, Hob," said Sybil and Roger together, "What is he like?"

"A King of a thousand," cried Hob, "The bravest, bonniest lad I ever set eyes on. But you shall hear. The main body of the King's men halted about half a bowshot from us, and the King with his chief people came a little forward, and on our side, Wat and a few more went out to meet him."

"Now, there are many stories about the affair which happened next, but I'll tell you just what I saw. We were watching with all our eyes to see how the matter went, and it was plain that Wat was carrying affairs with a high hand, when, all of a sudden, a man near the King—they saw it was the Lord Mayor of London—whipped out a sword

and struck Wat such a blow that he dropped on the spot, as dead as a stone.

“Oh, the noise and the shouting that burst out then, ‘They have killed our Captain,’ cried some. ‘It will be our turn next.’ ‘Revenge, revenge,’ was the word with others. For my part, I clapped an arrow to my bowstring, and raised our English shout of ‘Bows and Bills,’ for I thought there was nothing before us but to stand and fight it out like men.

“But, before a single string was loosed, what was our wonder and surprise to see the King put spurs to his nag, and gallop straight up to us. Every man stood silent, looking at him. He pulled up just in front of us, and smiled, and waved his hand to us.

“‘What, my friends,’ he said, ‘Would you shoot your King? Do not grieve for the death of that traitor. I, myself, will be your captain and leader. Follow me, and you shall have all you wish.’

“Now,” said Hob, striking his knee, and looking round on his audience, “What were we to do? Could we shoot the King?”

“No, no,” cried everyone.

“Of course not,” agreed Hob, “Could we refuse to follow him when he spoke such gallant

words to us, and looked upon us so kindly and nobly, and he but a mere lad?"

"No, no," they said again.

"We followed him like lambs to some open fields, and there we stayed awhile. A fresh body of the King's men soon arrived, and carried him off, but it was agreed on all hands that we had the royal promise that our wrongs should be righted, and our demands allowed. 'Come, boys,' said Tim Sly. 'Home is the word now,' and everybody seemed to be thinking the same, for the great crowd of us melted like snow in the sun, men striking away in all directions, each on his own road. That was the day before yesterday, and pleased enough we were to come over Beacon Hill this morning, and see the village, and our own countryside below. London's a fine place, but home's better."

"And have you seen father anywhere in London, Hob?" asked Roger.

"Never saw a sign of him there," replied Hob. "But when we came through Holton this morning, I saw both your father and mother riding down the main road. And they ought to be somewhere about your house, now, for we came across the country, shortening the distance."



THE KING ADDRESSING THE REBELS.

“Why didn’t you tell us before, Hob?” cried the children.

“You never asked me,” said Hob o’ the Mill. But the children had not waited for his reply. Out they flew like swallows, Roger and Sybil gave a hand each to little Hugh, and back they ran through the wood.

“There they are, there they are!” shouted the children with joy, as they saw two well-known figures hurrying through the trees to meet them, and in another moment they were all gathered together, safe and sound after the Peasants’ Rebellion.

[This young King who began so well came to a miserable end.

His reign was full of trouble because he was not strong enough to hold his own against his powerful and quarrelsome nobles, and because, towards the end of his reign, he did many unjust things. In 1399, he was driven from the throne by his cousin, Henry of Lancaster, and murdered in his prison. Henry IV. (1399—1413) was the first of the Lancastrian Kings. He suffered much from plots against his authority and position. In his reign, people first began to be put to death for their religion. His son, Henry V. (1413—1422), who followed him, is famous for his wars against the French. He won the great battle of Agincourt (1415), and had conquered a great part of France when he died in 1422. Henry VI. (1422—1461) was only nine months old when his father died. He grew up a gentle, quiet man, quite

unfit to rule the fierce nobles of his kingdom. The land in France, which his father had won, was all lost again, and a great quarrel broke out between two of the chief noblemen, the Duke of York, and the Duke of Somerset. The Duke of York was a relation of the King, and was very jealous of the Duke of Somerset, who was Henry's chief supporter, and held the King's confidence. Henry lost his reason, and York was chosen Protector of England. Somerset was thrown into prison. But Henry recovered. York was dismissed, and Somerset released and restored to his old position. Such was the illfeeling which now arose that a civil war broke out. By a civil war we mean a war where the soldiers fighting against each other all belong to the same nation. This struggle is called the War of the Roses, because the Yorkists took a white rose for their badge, while the Lancastrians wore a red one. In the main, the people took but a slight share in the fighting. The battles were chiefly fought by the retainers, that is the servants, or followers, of the great nobles. It was in reality a fight between two powerful houses and their friends, and was conducted in a very savage and cruel fashion. The Lancastrians were led by Margaret, Henry's wife, who upheld the rights of her little son Edward. It had been agreed to set Edward's claims aside, and that the Duke of York should be the next King, and, of course, this made Margaret angry. At the battle of Wakefield (1460), York was slain, and his son took his place, and was proclaimed King as Edward IV. In 1461, the Yorkists and Lancastrians fought a terrible battle at Towton, near York. The former won, and it is said that thirty-eight thousand men were slain in the fight.]

A FLIGHT FROM TOWTON FIELD.

- I. AT THE SIGN OF "THE HOLLY BUSH."
 - II. A NIGHT IN CORBY WOOD.
 - III. UNCLEAN ! UNCLEAN
-

I.

AT THE SIGN OF "THE HOLLY BUSH."

RANDAL NORREYS, deep in thought, sat at the window of "The Holly Bush," a little village inn twenty miles east of York. His eyes were fixed upon a merry, bustling scene which was going forward on the other side of the high road.

It was the day after Palm Sunday, 1461, and a market fair was in progress on the wide village green. Booths had been built, and, under their shelter, traders were spreading out their wares, great fires crackled and blazed, and cooks were busy roasting and boiling, preparing for the hungry crowds who would gather round their stalls at noon; and throngs of peasants, laughing and bright-faced, trooped up eagerly from every road and bye-path, intent upon their yearly merry-making.

A great brown bear was shuffling his clumsy dance amidst a ring of delighted rustics, and, nearer to the inn window a horse dealer and a countryman were chaffering busily over a shaggy, brown pony. A boy of thirteen, about Randal's own age, was holding the pony, and looking with bright eyes from his father to the dealer as the bargain was made.

Randal wondered how the people could be so gay and unconcerned, amidst the dreadful troubles of the time. Looking at them, one would say that England was a quiet, cheerful place, where people did their business without let or hindrance, took their pleasure gaily when the chance came in their way, and marched to the fair smart in their best, and with no more care on their minds than the rise or fall of prices.

To him, England was a land in sore distress, with great lords riding hither and thither, red rose or white rose at their breasts and caps, and followed by throngs of retainers*, every one ready for instant battle.

* Retainers were men who followed a great lord, bound to his service, and ready to fight in his quarrel. By means of retainers, each noble was furnished with a private army of his own.

Now Lancaster won, and now York, and with every swing of fortune Randal Norreys had been tossed up or down, for his father, Sir Henry Norreys, had been a close follower of the Earl of Oxford, one of the chief supporters of the Lancastrian party. But, at the battle of Wakefield, Sir Henry had been slain, and all the joy of the Lancastrian victory had been blackened for Randal and his mother.

A crushing blow had now fallen upon the hopes of their party, and Randal was a fugitive from the most dreadful battlefield of the civil war. Two days before, he had helped to arm Sir Robert Grey, his father's friend (whom Randal served as a page), for Towton Field, where the Lancastrians had been completely routed with fearful slaughter. Randal shuddered as he thought of the snow-covered plain he had seen. Here, the snow was brown, and trampled, and slushy on the fair ground, and white and smooth over the fields around, but at Towton, it had been horribly stained, and a crimson stream had moved sluggishly down each furrow.

Sir Robert Grey had fallen in the last stand of the Lancastrians, and Randal had been dragged out of the broken and flying tide of the Red Rose by his faithful attendant, Martin the Bowman. Martin

had secured two horses, and, thanks to his knowledge of the country between York and the sea, they had escaped so far.

Late on the previous night they had reached "The Holly Bush." The worn-out horses could go no further, and, as the pursuit had rolled directly towards York, they were safe for the present.

At this moment a clatter of hoofs and marching feet arose at the lower end of the village street. Randal looked out quickly but saw that there was no danger to be feared. It was but a party of their broken forces escaping in the same direction as themselves. Half-a-dozen men-at-arms rode in front, their wearied horses moving at a walk, while behind, plodded a score or more of footmen, their bills* over their shoulders, tramping heavily along the road. Some had flung away their red badges, others had no need, for the mud and blood with which they were stained hid them entirely.

Randal eyed their passage with wonder. They scarcely gave a glance aside to the cheerful, bustling fair-ground, but, with lowered glance and heads bent forward, pressed steadily through the

* The bill was a favourite weapon of English footmen in the olden time. It was an axe set upon a long staff, with which terrible, sweeping blows could be delivered.

village, and down the highway. Nor did they receive more attention than they bestowed. The country folk turned a careless eye on them for a moment then returned to their business, or pleasure. Here and there a child ran to look at them, or a dog came to the roadside to bay at them, but that was all.

Randal heard someone approach him, and looked up. It was Martin, a tall, brown-faced man of fifty, clad as an archer. He had followed the fortunes of the Norreys all his life, and his aim now was to bring his young master safe and sound to Lady Norreys, who was at Berwick. To this end, he was making his way towards Barneston, a little fishing village on the coast. There, he was certain of meeting with a faithful friend who would put to sea with them at an instant's warning.

"Martin," said Randal. "Is it not strange that the people should be going on with their fairs and markets as if nothing was taking place in the land. See, they scarcely turn their heads to look upon our men who hurry by."

"'Tis a picture of the times, Master Randal," returned Martin. "I saw much the same when I was in the south, six years ago, at the first fight

of St. Albans. The people in general trouble but little about the war. Why should they? It matters nought to them who bears rule, whether York or Lancaster. But I came to give you warning to prepare for the road. The horses are in good heart again, and we must go far to-day."

Martin returned to the stable yard behind the inn, but Randal still lingered a moment at the window. His heart went out to the cheerful crowd on the green, and he would gladly have exchanged his rich embroidered jerkin* for the plain homespun of the village boys whom he saw gathered round the huge fires, warming their hands at the blaze, and roasting apples in the ashes, while the smoke went up in a smooth, dun column into the still, grey sky.

As he stood there, a man crossed the road quickly, and pushed the casement back. He gave a swift glance about the room, empty but for Randal, before he spoke.

"Master Randal," said he, "glad is my heart to see you safe. And how many of our brave lads have escaped with you?"

"Only one," said Randal, the suddenness of the address and question taking him by surprise.

*A jerkin was a close fitting jacket.

“Only one,” returned the man, “I am glad I have the chance of speaking to you. I am a true friend to Norreys, though perchance you know me not, and I can tell you for a certainty that in a couple of hours a score of men-at-arms will pass this way, Red Rose men every one. Wait for them I beg of you. Bid your man tarry for that strong company of which I speak. But stay, who is he?”

“Martin the Bowman,” answered Randal, thinking the man was certainly a fugitive of their party.

“Ay,” said the other slowly. “Well, bid him wait.” But his tone was a little different now, and, without a word further, he went swiftly away down the road. As he went, a feeling of chill doubt and mistrust arose in Randal’s mind, and he ran to the yard where Martin had already saddled the horses. Martin heard his story to an end, and then asked sharply:—

“How many eyes had he?”

“One,” replied the boy, “and that very dark and bright.”

Martin said no more, but began strapping on the baggage with the speed of one who sees that not an instant is to be lost.

“Run swiftly, and pay the landlord, and back

here with what haste you may," said he to Randal.

"Why, Martin, what do you fear?"

"I'll tell you that, Master Randal, when we are full trot from this place. Lose not a moment."

Away ran the boy, and within ten minutes they had taken the road, and were riding swiftly towards the coast.

"Did I do wrong, Martin, to answer the man's questions?" asked Randal.

"As for that," replied the archer. "If twice the years had passed over your head the answer might easily have been shaken out of you, coming as he did so suddenly."

"Is he bringing some of the enemy after us, do you think?"

"I do, indeed," said Martin, "and on an errand common enough in these times."

"Why, what would happen to us?"

"Death," said the archer shortly.

"Death," cried Randal. "But they would hold us to ransom."

"Not they," said Martin, and was silent for a little while.

Randal looked over his shoulder as if fearing to hear a challenge from their pursuers at any moment,

but the road stretched away, long, smooth, and empty, as far as he could see. Martin began to speak again.

“That man,” said he, “is as noted a spy as his master is noted for cruelty.

“Who is his master?” cried Randal.

“Gilbert Norreys, your father’s cousin, a Yorkist.”

“I have heard much of that man, but I have never seen him,” said Randal, “but why should he injure me, his blood relation?”

“Ah,” said old Martin, shaking his head, “blood relationship goes for nothing now-a-days. Many a fight in these cruel times have I seen where brother stood against brother, ay, and father against son. Gilbert Norreys wants your estate, and thinks, now that you have lost Sir Robert Grey’s protection, to make sure of it.”

“But, Martin,” said the boy, “he can get that without pursuing me. Now the Yorkists have won, they can take what they like.”

“That’s a game of see-saw, little master,” said the brown, old archer. “Lancaster is down to-day, but may be up to-morrow, and then where are Sir Gilbert’s hopes. But if you were out of the way, he would succeed without any more trouble. It would fall to him as his right.”

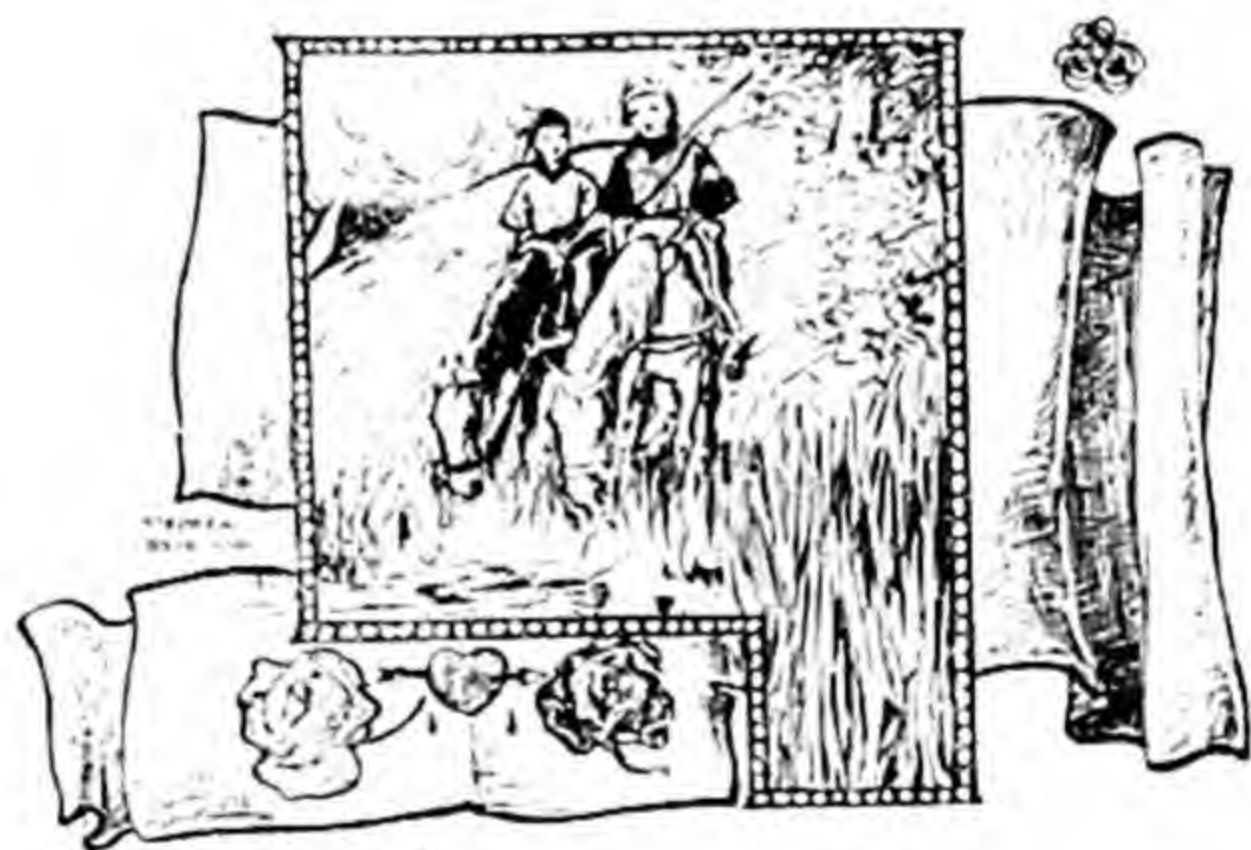


RANDAL AND MARTIN FLYING FROM THE GILBERT NORMANS.

“Let us ride faster, Martin,” cried the boy.

“And spoil the horses’ wind?” said the archer.

“No, no, Master Randal. They are going now as fast as we dare push them. They are of no great quality, and I would give much if that rogue spy had not discovered our road.”



II.

A NIGHT IN CORBY WOOD.

ABOUT midday they reached a little wood, standing at the head of a long, gentle slope. Martin twisted about in his saddle, and looked behind. From this point they had the road in view for a couple of miles or more, and he sprang down.

“We will give the horses a rest and a feed in the shelter of these trees,” said he, “and take some food ourselves.”

He had bought provisions, both for themselves and the horses, at a little inn some miles back, and now got them out quickly.

Randal sprang down, and stretched himself, stiff from the saddle.

“Why do you not go on to an inn, Martin?” he asked.

The archer laughed. “And suppose while we sat toasting ourselves comfortably at the fire, Sir Gilbert and the one-eyed spy rode up, and thrust their heads in at the window. A rat-trap would be the fellow to it.”

“While from this hill-top we can see a long

way behind us," cried Randal. "How stupid I am!"

"We can't have grey heads on green shoulders," said Martin, tying the horses to a low tree, and spreading their provender before them. "There is your bread and meat, little master. Fall to."

In an hour they started again, and rode steadily all the afternoon, making but one short pause, while Martin renewed their stock of food at a farmhouse. From every rise they looked anxiously back, but the road remained empty. As the day wore on, the sky grew duller, and thicker. Time and again, the archer looked up impatiently, and whistled like a sailor whistling for a wind.

"What is it you are calling for, Martin?" said the boy.

"The sky is full of snow," replied he. "Would that it might come down as thick and fast as ever snow fell!"

As the archer talked, Randal had been riding with his face turned over his shoulder.

"Oh, Martin, what is that?" he cried.

Down a distant slope a dark patch was sweeping, clear against the snow. Martin looked steadily for an instant, then put the horses to a gallop.

"'Tis five or six men," said he, "and well-

mounted too, by the pace they are riding. They have heard of us, I fear, at the farmhouse, and trust to overtake us speedily."

They had scarcely ridden a mile further, when a great cry of thankfulness escaped the archer. Of a sudden, the air had become thick with twinkling snowflakes. The storm grew swiftly, and in ten minutes they were wrapped in a whirling cloud of snow. Martin leaned from his saddle and closely scanned the road.

"Fall behind me, little master," said he, "and ride as exactly in my steps as you can."

Randal did so, and Martin continued to observe the road.

"We are approaching a large village," he said, "and there has been enough traffic of men and horses this afternoon to confuse our steps, and, mayhap, I can cut an hour's advantage out of it."

He now sat up straight, and kept an eager watch upon the right-hand side of the road. The mouth of a narrow lane appeared, and Martin turned into it. Randal instantly followed, and they still kept one behind the other, for the lane was not wide enough for the two to ride abreast.

"Now," said Martin, "Let us pray we meet no one in this narrow track. It goes round the village

and comes out again to the high road a mile on the other side. Our pursuers will ask for us in the village for a certainty, and if no one has seen us go by, they will be thrown out, and very likely take a cast back, and so lose time."

Two hundred yards further, Martin flung out his left hand. Randal peered through the snow, and saw a faint glow as if a great fire was shining through an uncurtained window. They were passing behind the village inn. Fortunately the snow deadened the sound of their horses' feet, no houses stood close to the track they were following, and no one was abroad in the driving storm.

"I believe we have cleared the place unseen," said the archer, as they sprang out to the high road again, and hurried forward, "and time is precious now."

"How far are we from Barneston, Martin?"

"About eight miles," said he, "but these poor beasts will go slower, and slower, from this, on. The road gets much worse, the snow is balling continually under their feet, and the hard day's work is telling on them."

"Shall we reach Barneston to-night Martin?"

"No, Master Randal, that we shall not. All I look for now is night and Corby Wood."

The night came first, and, as the blackness settled down, the snow ceased falling. There was no moon, and the heavy clouds still wrapped the sky, and caused the earth to be covered with solid darkness.

Martin had dismounted, and was leading the horses up a hill, when a faint, sweet note came to their ears through the silent night. They stopped and listened, and it came again. Some one, far off, was winding a bugle horn.

"'Tis Gilbert Norrey's call, I know it well," said the archer, pushing on again; "they have become scattered in some fashion, and he is gathering them round him."

Randal shivered to think that his enemies were so close upon his track, but Martin heard him move, and laughed gaily.

"Fear nothing, little master," he said, "Here are the first trees of Corby Wood, and within fifty yards we will leave them the road to themselves."

Randal looked above, and about him, but the blackness of the night was such that he could mark no added shade of darkness as they entered the wood, yet though he could see nothing, he felt the difference. The trees seemed to press the gloom more closely upon him.

The archer now walked before the horses, with the reins gathered in one hand. In the other he held out his bow at full length, so that it touched the trees which stood in rank along the path. Tap, tap, tap, the bow fell upon trunk after trunk, until it missed its regular stroke. They had come to an interval. It was the mouth of the path for which Martin was seeking, and he turned down it at once.

He walked swiftly along, and the tired horses ambled after him. The path wound round, and round, and at last the archer stopped. "Here is good shelter under these holly bushes," he said. "I shall fasten the horses and then slip back to the road, to mark how many are following us. Will you stay with them, little master?"

"No, Martin," said Randal, "I will come with you."

"You will see nothing. I can assure you," said the archer, tying the reins to a branch as he talked. "I can make shift to count them by ear, but eyes will do nothing to-night."

"Nevertheless, I will come," said Randal, and they went back together. They had nearly reached the mouth of the path, when, suddenly, a tiny, red point of light appeared, moved for an instant, and vanished again.

Martin stopped, and whistled softly.

“A torch !” he said, “a torch, they are provided with light. We saw it between the trees. Now a trunk has hidden it. See ! It comes into sight again.”

“What will you do, Martin ?” asked the boy.

“First, little master, thank my lucky star that I returned here,” said the archer. “They might have turned down the path and come upon us unawares. But now, we shall be ready to meet them with steel point and grey goose wing.”

Martin drew a little aside from the path, searching about by sense of touch until he found what he wanted. Then, returning, he led Randal to the spot he had chosen. The boy heard a low, musical twang as the archer tried his bow, and found the string taut and true. Next, he felt Martin pressing arrows into his hand.

“Take these arrows,” said the archer, “now feel exactly where my shoulder is, straight in front of you. Lay an arrow on it, feather first, and as soon as I take it, clap another there.”

As they took position, the glowing point of fire came into view again, but much nearer. Now they heard voices and the trampling of horses. On, and on, came the pursuers, and soon the red glare of the

torch began to flash through the trunks, and, coming into the utter blackness, and being assisted by the snow, seemed to light up the wood in a surprising fashion.

First came the one-eyed spy, holding the torch aloft, and bending down to examine the track or their footsteps. Behind walked three stout fellows with cross-bows ready to shoot, then rode a knight in full armour, the polished steel flashing in the torchlight, and, lastly a man-at-arms leading a string of horses. When he came to the point where the marks turned down the path, the spy called upon them to halt, and the knight rode to the front.

“They have turned down here Sir Gilbert,” said the one-eyed man.

Sir Gilbert said nothing, but stared attentively at the marks. The scene, as it presented itself to Randal, was striking in the extreme. Being furthest in the background his glance commanded everything. They were covered by a screen of tangled brambles, and immediately before him knelt the archer, his bow drawn to his ear, and rigid as a figure of stone. Sir Gilbert, a bare dozen yards away, had the visor* of his helmet up,

*The visor of a helmet was the piece which covered the face. It could be lifted up and down.

and the arrow was laid full on his face. So swift and sure a Bowman as old Martin, fed rapidly with arrows, held them at a deadly advantage, and Randal felt as secure as if he had been eyeing them from behind a stout rampart. "Shall we follow the track, Sir Gilbert?" asked the spy.

For a few moments Sir Gilbert remained silent and uncertain. Little did he think that his own life trembled in the balance of that decision. Had he but lifted a finger to point his men along the path, Martin's arrow, at such short range, would have gone through brain and headpiece.

"No," said he at last. "To follow out such a path without the torch would be impossible, and it is clear that the old archer is at bay somewhere within this wood. To advance upon him with a light would be to present such a target that he could mark us down, himself unseen. How far to the next inn?"

"Two miles, or more," replied the spy.

"Lead on, then," said the knight. "They cannot escape us to-morrow."

The spy lighted a fresh torch, for the one he held was nearly spent. This he tossed away into the snow, where it was quenched instantly, the

band moved on, and were soon out of sight in the depths of the wood.

Until the last flicker of the light had vanished, neither archer nor boy moved nor spoke. Then Martin blew out a great breath, and slipped his arrows back into the quiver.

“Search out yonder scrap of torch, Master Randal,” he said, “’twill be useful to us.”

Randal had marked the spot where it had fallen, and soon had it in his hand, and they hurried back to the place where the horses had been left.

“Sir Gilbert had a good idea of your plans, Martin,” said the boy.

“Ay, ay,” laughed the archer, “He knows the rules of war. But it was fine to hear him talking about the trap they might blunder into, when already he stood in the midst of it.”

“Had you a mind to let the arrow fly, Martin?”

“That I had not,” said the archer. “The twang of the string would have given them a hint, and three of them had their cross-bows ready bent. A chance flight into the bushes might easily have settled our business. All parties were suited when Sir Gilbert struck for the inn.”

By this time they had reached the horses, and the archer, producing flint and tinder box from his

pouch, struck a light, and kindled the piece of torch they had brought with them.

Randal now saw that they stood in a little hollow surrounded by rocky walls.

“Take my dagger,” said Martin, “and cut away at those low-hanging fir branches, and beat the snow from them.”

Randal began to slash away at once, while Martin carefully tethered and fed the horses. Then he came to the help of his young master, and they soon had a great heap of springy fir boughs tossed down in a dry corner, where the sheltering rock had kept the snow away. They had barely finished this arrangement when the torch which Martin had stuck upright in a heap of snow, gave a dying hiss and went out.

“Well, well,” said he, “we must have our supper and go to bed in the dark.”

He had obtained for themselves a great brown loaf and a piece of cheese, and Randal thought he had never tasted sweeter food in his life. Yet his weariness was even greater than his hunger, and no sooner had he folded himself in his cloak, and laid himself down on the elastic cushion of the fir boughs, than he fell instantly into a deep, dreamless slumber.

III.

UNCLEAN ! UNCLEAN !!

RANDAL seemed to have barely settled himself to sleep when he felt the archer shaking his arm.

“Oh, Martin,” he said, rubbing his eyes, “it can’t be the morning yet. It is quite dark. And I have only just lain down.”

Martin laughed softly, and thrust a piece of the brown loaf into his hand.

“Eat, little master,” said he, “and quickly, too. Daylight must not find us in this wood, or we are lost.”

While Randal munched his barley bread, Martin made the horses ready for the march, and as soon as the boy had finished, they pushed on through the wood.

“Which way will you go, Martin?”

“We must follow bye roads until we are well past the inn,” said the archer. “Or we should walk straight into the wolf’s mouth.”

He himself was on foot, leading the horses, and as they went, a faint, grey light began to steal towards them from the eastern side of the wood.

Martin gave a cry of vexation.

“That comes of not being able to see the stars,” he muttered. “Day is nearer than I thought.”

The path was very narrow, and, in places, tangled by fallen trees and overgrown brushwood, and as the wood began to thin, and show signs of the open country, they saw that it was clear day without.

“Stop here, until I see whether we dare venture beyond the cover of the trees,” said the archer, and gave Randal the reins of both horses to hold. Martin went forward, and peered about carefully. He seemed satisfied, and went a little further, when suddenly Randal heard a loud hum, as if a great bee had buzzed past him, and, at the same instant, with a loud cry, Martin reeled forward and fell.

Randal set up a dreadful shriek at seeing himself robbed of the man who alone stood between him and death. He was about to fling himself from his horse and rush to the place, when to his great surprise and relief, Martin sat up, and waved to him to keep back. Then the archer rose to his knee, and peered through the clump of gorse behind which he had fallen. Two men were racing towards it, the foremost runner being the one-eyed spy. Martin fitted an arrow to his bow with the speed of light, and shot. With the twang of the parting arrow,

the spy flung up his arms, leaped high into the air, and fell upon his face. The other man darted aside, and hid himself behind a tree. Martin ran swiftly back, swung himself into the saddle, and they rode away through the fringe of the wood. A parting bolt hummed after them from the second man, but wide of the mark, and away he flew in the opposite direction.

“Oh, Martin,” cried Randal. “I thought the shaft had struck you.”

The archer chuckled. “Not within a yard, little master. But that was a rare cry you let out. It was that, and not the worn, old trick I tried, which deceived them. They thought for a surety that you had seen me pierced through and through. However, that rogue will spy on honest men no more.”

Martin sat up in the saddle, and studied the country before them. They were riding across an open heath, through which ran a wide smooth track. The ground was firm under the snow, and the horses galloped merrily along, flinging it about in white showers, and puffing out great clouds of breath.

“How far are the rest away, Martin?”

The archer turned his head and whistled sharply.

"You can see for yourself, little master, worse luck."

Randal looked back. They were three-quarters of a mile from the wood, and a knot of horsemen was just bursting from it.

"Can we not go faster, Martin ?" he cried.

"In a minute," replied the archer. "We are going as fast as we dare over this snowy grass."

Almost as Martin spoke, they reached a causeway running through the heath, and now the horses were driven to the top of their speed. Neither boy nor archer spoke, nor even looked at each other. They had no word to spare, except to encourage their steeds, no glance to give except upon the road where they eyed every inch, to be ready to meet with hand and rein a chance slip on an icy spot. Thus they rode for three miles, and when they dashed out to the highway at a point where it crossed a corner of the heath, their pursuers had gained but little.

Barneston was now four miles ahead, and, if their steeds held out, they were safe. But a couple of miles more, and the poor beasts began to flag. They had striven gallantly, but their utmost had now been accomplished, and the powerful horses of the pursuing party gained steadily. The

sea was now in full sight, and seemed so near that Randal looked for Barneston at every turn of the road.

“We shall win, now, Martin, shall we not?” he said, eagerly.

“They are nearing us fast,” said the archer.

“Do you fear they will catch us yet?”

“I do,” said Martin.

At the moment he spoke his horse gave a great stumble. Martin drew rein, and leaped down. He laid his long bow over his shoulder, and started to run swiftly at Randal’s side. Sir Gilbert and his men swept round a bend in the rear, and set up a great shout of triumph when they saw Martin dismounted and running. Martin caught the shout and smiled grimly. He was not yet beaten. The road was winding through a rocky country, with frequent turns, and they lost sight of their enemies once more.

“Follow me,” cried the archer. He struck away at a sharp angle to the road, and ran directly towards a tall rock which seemed to block all further passage. As they came nearer, Randal saw a large, irregular hole at its foot. It was the mouth of a cave, and he hastened to spring from the saddle, and seek its shelter. The entrance was not large

enough for the horses to enter, and Martin fastened them quickly to a bush close by, for the second horse, relieved of his weight, had trotted steadily after them. As he followed Randal, Sir Gilbert and his men came round the turn, and galloped down on them. At a sudden note of the knight's horn they stopped, and time for them, too. An arrow rattled on Sir Gilbert's helmet, and with such force had it been discharged that he reeled in the saddle. In the snug shelter of the cave, Martin had set his bow instantly to work, and his enemies made haste to ride behind a thicket.

"There was a stupid trick," said Martin, "to lay my arrow on the knight in his armour of proof. Had I marked one of the others we had been an enemy the less."

In a moment, the archer and Randal had taken position, just as they had placed themselves in the wood the night before. Martin drew well back from the opening, so that there was no chance of a cross-bow bolt being discharged at them with any certainty, and Randal stood behind him, ready to supply arrows as fast as they should be shot. For two or three minutes they saw no sign of their enemies, then, through the gaps of the leafless boughs, they perceived them scattering right and

left. Martin tried one or two flying shots at them but the cover was too thick to afford him a clear aim, and he saw that he was throwing arrows away.

“What are they going to do, Martin?”

“Rush from five different points at once,” said the old archer in a gloomy voice, “and the knight is certain to get in, for I must spend my arrows where they are sure to pierce.”

“And what then, Martin?”

“Nay, little master, I cannot tell you more. I will do my best, but I can promise nought.”

Randal pressed the archer's rough hand, and Martin stroked his young master's bright hair. Neither spoke further, but they understood each other well, and awaited their enemies with firm resolve to face them to the last.

A sharp blast rang out on the bugle horn. Martin drew his bow to the ear but no movement followed the note.

It was clearly one of warning to be ready, and the next would sound the onset. Randal watched the thicket with wide, staring eyes and dry lips. It seemed a long, long time between each thump of his slowly-beating heart, and a humming came and went in his ears. All the same, he held the arrows steadily, one on Martin's shoulder, another in his

left hand. The seconds dragged slowly on. Suddenly, a noise as of some one slowly and heavily walking came to them from behind. There was an inner cave, and some one was moving in it. Then came a faint tinkle of a bell. Still no hint of the truth flashed across their minds, when, of a sudden, there appeared a dreadful, stooping figure, its body and head wrapped round with a coarse, woollen cloak, swinging in one hand a bell, which now broke out into loud jangling, and in the other holding a long stick, with which it groped its feeble way. It was a leper.

"Unclean ! Unclean !!" cried the leper, as he passed through the outer cave and searched with his stick for the entrance. "Unclean ! Unclean !!"

With the first jangling of the bell, the bugle horn had sounded the onset, and forth bounded the five attackers, the four men running with their cross-bows laid for the mouth of the cave, the knight flourishing his sword.

But that crouching, sightless figure checked them dead. Men who feared no danger of sword or shaft shrank, white to the lips, from that dreadful life-in-death, the plague of leprosy.

"Unclean ! Unclean !!" The poor, solitary wretch, driven by the fears of men far from their

company and sympathy, raised his hollow, terrible cry, and clanged his bell until the rocks re-echoed his mournful chorus.

There was not a man there but believed that the horrible disease could leap and strike him where he stood, and they broke and fled, uttering cries of affright.

The terror of Randal and Martin was not less than that of the men without. They also hastened to fly from the cave as soon as the leper had taken a few steps from the entrance ; but while the others had only to fly in dread of the awful pestilence, they had to escape both.

“ Follow me, little master,” cried Martin, and ran like a hare for the clump of trees behind which their enemies had been hidden. Here, the horses were tethered just as Martin had expected. No one was to be seen but Sir Gilbert, who had returned there, and was about to wind his horn to call his followers about him again. His back was towards them, and the sound of the bugle filled his ears, so that he knew not of their approach. Martin had left his bow in the cave, and had no other weapon than his broad dagger. Of what avail was that against a man sheathed in mail ? He half drew it, then thrust it back, and hurled



'UNCLE SAM AND THE ENGLISH'

himself upon Sir Gilbert with all his force. Putting both hands against the knight's shoulders, Martin flung him headlong forwards.

Crash ! went Sir Gilbert's helmet against a tree trunk. "Up ! Up !! " screamed Martin and with two or three swift sweeps of his dagger, he cut through the reins with which the five horses were fastened.

Nimbly as a cat, Randal swarmed up a tall horse and swung himself into the saddle, Martin leaped upon Sir Gilbert's own charger and away they galloped, just as the knight, awkward in his heavy armour, got to his feet. Two or three bolts whistled after them, but sped harmlessly, while the other horses, freed and riderless, ran wildly about the plain.

"Oh, Martin," cried Randal, "who would have dreamed of such an escape as this ? "

"Ay, ay, little master," laughed the archer. "While there's life there's hope. Marry, but that poor stricken man did us a good turn, dreadfully as he terrified us."

"They have to catch their horses before they can follow," cried Randal. "Ours will do them no service."

"We shall be out at sea before they sight Barneston," said Martin.

The archer was right. Barneston was reached, the fishing vessel was put to sea, and they were riding merrily over the waves, when three horsemen dashed down the steep cliff road, which led to the little village. The knight, whose armour picked him out clearly at the distance, rode his horse, saddle deep into the surge and shook his fist furiously at the dancing skiff. But his rage was all in vain, as, with a favouring south wind, the fishing boat ploughed through the waves towards Berwick and friends, and safety.

NOTE ON LEPERS :—Leprosy was common in England in the Middle Ages. The spread of this dreadful disease was largely helped by the filthy habits of the poorer classes. The lowest orders—the serfs or villeins—lived in mud hovels which had neither windows nor chimneys. Food was plentiful, but for months together in the winter they had no fresh meat or vegetables. The unfortunate people who became afflicted with leprosy were regarded as outcasts. They had to ring a bell and cry out “Unclean !” to announce their approach, so that others might avoid them. They were not allowed to enter churches lest they should infect the congregation, but gathered at an opening in the wall, through which they could hear the service. In some of our very old churches these lepers’ windows may still be seen. With the adoption of healthier modes of living, leprosy died out.

[After Towton, the Lancastrians were beaten at Hedgley Moor and Hexham (1464). Margaret fled to France, and Henry VI., the former king, was shut up in the Tower. Edward IV. reigned from 1461 to 1483. In 1471, after quarrelling with his principal supporter, the Earl of Warwick (so powerful a man, that he was called the

King-Maker), and his brother Clarence, Edward IV., was compelled to retire from the country, and, for a little while, Henry VI. was brought from the Tower, and placed on the throne. But Edward IV. soon returned and collected large forces. He fought a great battle at Barnet (1471) where Warwick was defeated and slain. Then he marched against Margaret, who had gathered another army. They met at Tewkesbury, where the Lancastrians were beaten and Margaret was captured. Her son, Edward, was either killed in the fight or slain in cold blood shortly after it. Next, the death of Henry VI. was announced, but whether he was murdered or not is uncertain. After Edward IV. died in 1483, his son, Edward V., became king. But he only reigned two months. Then he and his brother disappeared just as his uncle Richard took the crown, and it is generally believed that they were murdered in the Tower. Richard III., brother of Edward IV., reigned two years (1483-1485). The people who thought that Richard had caused the little princes to be murdered, now turned their thoughts to Henry, Earl of Richmond, a Lancastrian noble of royal blood, a descendant of Edward III. Richmond collected some troops and invaded England. A battle was fought at Bosworth Field (1485), where Richard was defeated, and slain. Richmond now became king, as Henry VII., and with him a new era begins. After nearly thirty years of fighting, in which the old, fierce, quarrelsome nobility was almost destroyed, it was possible for the king to make his government more effective, since a strong king had not now to spend his strength in keeping his barons in order, nor was a weak king borne down by them.]

NOTE.—At this point—the parting of the ways between what is called the Old and the New Monarchy, or between Mediæval and Modern England—this book will end. What boys and girls did in the times which succeeded will be told in the next book of this series.

*Very sorry — you will certainly
fine it now, on page 265.*

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